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What kind of place is the Anglican parish? A theological description

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What kind of place is the Anglican parish?
A theological description

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Research Based Thesis

Doctorate in Theology and Ministry

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Contents

Abstract

Despite being, for centuries, 'the basic territorial unit in the organisation of this country' (Pounds, 2000), the Anglican parish remains a remarkably neglected theme, rarely described in theological terms. This Research-Based Thesis undertakes such a description, underpinned by two related convictions: firstly, that the Church's vision for parish ministry would be enhanced by what De Soja (1989) called the 'reassertion of space' in contemporary social theory – a movement that has received only limited application to the parish. Secondly, that the theology of place would equally benefit from comprehending the rich inheritance of spatial praxis invested in the parish system.

Having surveyed the interdisciplinary currents flowing into this theme, the first part of the thesis begins with a methodology that grounds place-formation in a dynamic cycle of ontology, revelation, tradition and vocation – a pattern, also, for the structure of this research. The second chapter explores the basis for viewing the parish in terms of 'Christ in our place', a significant theme in protestant Christology, but not often applied geographically. Building on this theological foundation, the thesis considers how recent developments in human geography enable the perception of parish as a spatial, ethical practice of 'neighbourhood'.

The second part of the research weighs the parish's theoretical description against its enduring historical role in English society. This 'vocation', it is argued, comprises a threefold call to nation, neighbourhood and nature: each being a form of 'common ground'. The conclusion, having summarised these findings, addresses certain challenges facing the Anglican parish, proposing its renewal as a radical form of local belonging. An ethnographic case study, 'Parish and Belonging in Oxted and Tandridge', is included as an appendix, providing an important empirical accompaniment. At a time when its viability is increasingly questioned, it is hoped that this thesis will contribute towards future strategy for parochial ministry and the broader national conversation about 'localism' and cultural identity.

Introduction

'The church', wrote Richard Hooker, 'is a visible society… the place and limits whereof are certain'.[1] As a foundational form of ecclesiastical polity, the 'place' of the parish (in its varying forms), in one sense, is plain – to the extent that Anthea Jones (2000) can describe it as 'the bedrock of European civilization as a whole'.[2] Although by no means the only version of parochial organisation[3], the English - specifically Anglican - parish is uniquely embedded in national culture and society, by virtue both of its antiquity and close allegiance with secular governance. Yet it remains an elusive theme, whose 'place', theologically, is far from certain.[4] Whilst ecclesiastical history has long formed a pillar of academic training for ordained ministry, ecclesiastical geography has not - contributing to the often-uninformed assumptions in contemporary church debate and mission strategy regarding the definition of 'local'.[5] At a time when its relevance and viability are increasingly questioned within the Church of England and with plans progressing for the Church in Wales' abandonment of parochial organisation[6], an assessment of the profoundly influential role of the parish system in English life is of the greatest import. This thesis will examine the distinctive form of social and communal life created by the Anglican parish: applying and, hopefully, advancing, the emerging discipline of 'place-theology' by beginning to fill a conspicuous gap in contemporary scholarship.

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[1] Richard Hooker, *Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity Book 3:1:14* (London, J.M.Dent & Sons, 1954), p.297.
[2] *A Thousand Years of the English Parish* (Moreton-in-Marsh, Windrush Press, 2000), p.27.
[3] For an overview of parish in European context, cf. Katherine French, *The Parish in English Life, 1400-1640* (Manchester, MUP, 1997), c.2; also C.J.Godfrey in *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, CUP, 1962), c.9. Authors generally concur both on the universality of the parochial idea in the Western Church and also its unique penetration in England.
[4] Cf. Malcom Torry (ed.) *The Parish*: *People, Place and Ministry: a theological and practical exploration* (Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2004); Guest, Tusting & Woodhead (eds.), *Congregational studies in the UK*: *Christianity in a Post-Christian Context* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006).
[5] The Report *Mission-Shaped Church* states, for example, 'a geographical approach (i.e. to the organisation of churches) alone is not sufficient', without recognising the essentially geographical nature of the 'networks' it espouses. (London, CHP, 2004), p.12.
[6] For details of the plan to replace parishes with 'ministry areas', see http://www.churchinwales.org.uk/review/ministry-areas/, accessed 16/6/15.

Viewing the land

David Martin (1988) has warned that 'parish' can be easily become a 'code-word' for 'mere communitarian nostalgia'.[7] Because parochial life is vulnerable to this familiar criticism - which must be acknowledged at the outset – the two parts of this thesis take care to balance theoretical or idealistic conceptions of the parish with the evidence of its historic place in English society. In the appendix, an ethnographic case study, 'Parish and Belonging in Oxted and Tandridge', seeks to test the 'reality' of parish in one contemporary situation, finding it to be a strikingly potent indicator of common life. Conducted before the main body of the thesis was written, this study informs and illustrates much of the theoretical research and provides an accompanying empirical point of reference.

In an important sense, therefore, this thesis is a personal reflection on ministerial practice, motivated in part by the desire to understand the traditions, concepts and practices that shape a perception of place 'as' parish. Whilst it may thus be seen as a work of practical theology, it will try to avoid the tendency of that discipline to lean heavily towards prioritising local description over theoretical exposition, with the result that, as Graham, Ward and Walton (2005) acknowledge:

> The analysis of local context … is often more accomplished than engagement with church history, doctrine and Bible.[8]

Given the wide, interdisciplinary scope of its subject matter, it is important to be clear what areas will *not* be dealt with in what follows: the most immediately obvious being the gathered, liturgical life of the church congregation. There will be little attention given to the nature of the sacraments, evangelism, the occasional offices or indeed any of the familiar ingredients of parish ministry. This has consciously been avoided, partly because it is the common focus of

[7] In Giles Ecclestone (ed.), *The Parish Church?* (London, Mowbray, 1988), p.45.
[8] Elaine Graham, Heather Walton & Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection*: *Methods* (London, SCM, 2005), p.11.

practical and pastoral studies, the theological (and, to a degree, spatial) dynamics of which have been ably considered elsewhere[9] and partly because the chief fascination and concern is the harder-to-define space of the parish as, in Rackham's words, 'the smallest unit ... of spiritual and secular geography'.[10] Whilst the parish church building will be considered to some degree in Chapter Six and the accompanying case study, it will be approached solely insofar as it embodies this broader local description.

Nor is this research a direct engagement in the importunate questions regarding the future of the parish system. These form its horizon and will be surveyed in outline in the concluding chapter, but the foreground to be covered here is the 'theological geography' of the parochial: the territory on which Anglican ministry has long been practised, but which is rarely delved into. To some extent, this marks a response to the question of 'what's in a word?' What are the distinctive connotations and associations of 'parish' - a deep word whose soundings have profoundly shaped English society?

As such, it must be acknowledged to be a highly personal description. Coming from a long family line of parish priests, stretching back nearly two hundred years, the parochial inheritance is of more than professional or academic interest: the thesis seeking definition for a place that is, at heart, intuitively perceived. As Team Rector, currently, of four parishes in the South-Eastern corner of the Anglican Diocese of Southwark, I have spent nearly twenty years in parochial ministry, the majority of which has been in urban contexts – firstly in Harrow in North-West London and then, for ten years, as Vicar of Gipsy Hill, in the London Borough of Lambeth. This doctoral research began during that time, when I was especially concerned to appreciate the effect upon the parish of the 'fields beneath' the urban landscape[11] and was further shaped by moving, halfway through the doctorate, to the more rural setting described in the appendix. With

[9] Of particular value in analysing the psycho-spatial dimensions of liturgical life, are Bruce Reed's *The Dynamics of Religion* (London, DLT, 1978) and James Hopewell's groundbreaking study, *Congregation* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1987).
[10] Oliver Rackham, *The History of the Countryside* (London, J.M.Dent, 1986), p.434.
[11] This phrase is the title of Gillian Tindall's history of Kentish Town.

the M25 motorway cutting like a river through my parishes, London looms large in these reflections: the tension between urban and rural has been profoundly felt and is expressed in the concluding sections on nostalgia and the 'pastoral'.

The remaining personal observation to 'declare' is that, whilst my priestly forbears all practiced from within the Anglo-Catholic tradition, my own ministerial formation has largely been within the Evangelical wing of the Church. Recognizing that the greater part of contemporary theological scholarship about place follows a more catholic path[12], it was also curiously apparent that many of the most interesting doctrinal considerations of space and time came, by contrast, from theologians in the Reformed tradition. Seeking an integration of these traditions, this thesis represents the answer of an Open Evangelical priest, serving in 'classic' central Anglican congregations, to the question, *what kind of place is the Anglican parish?*

Sketching the terrain

The academic currents running into what might be termed 'parochial theology' draw on diverse sources, including history, geography and sociology, as well as its foundations in Christian doctrine and ecclesiology. What is lacking, K.D.M.Snell asserts, in his pioneering social history *Parish and Belonging* (2006), is 'holistic' research into the parish that can comprehend the spectrum of this theme.[13]

The concept of 'parish' finds its provenance in the integration of the early church into the civic life of the Roman Empire. As Martyn Percy (2008) has observed, the Graeco-Roman *paroikia* (or *parochia)* denoted the community of those either living outside city boundaries (*paroikos* literally meaning 'beside the house') or within the bounds, as 'foreigners'.[14] Studies of its adoption and adaptation by the early church, when, in Hooker's words, 'the body of the people must needs be

[12] For example, Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred* (London, SCM, 2001); David Brown: *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford, OUP, 2004).
[13] (Cambridge, CUP, 2006), p.15.
[14] In ed. Steven Croft, *The Future of the Parish System* (London, CHP, 2006), p.4.

severed by divers precincts'[15] and the subsequent spread of the parochial idea in early medieval Europe are, as might be expected, largely historical. Godfrey (1962, 1969) provides two useful surveys that focus on the Gregorian mission to England under Augustine and the role of his successor at Canterbury, Theodore of Tarsus (often credited with 'introducing' the parish to England[16]) in implementing regional organisation upon the hybrid of Roman and Celtic influences that formed the Anglo-Saxon Church, before 'England' had any unified sense of national identity.[17] For Godfrey, the parochial idea as a 'local gathering' was so fundamental to the early church that he can describe it as 'native to the Christian religion as such'.[18] Nevertheless, many scholars of the English parish express reservation as to its origins[19] and examination of its gradual establishment, both as a form of church life and as the frame of local topography – a process that, by common recognition, did not form any coherent 'system' until the twelfth century[20] - is made imprecise by the relative invisibility of the parish in historiography. As the great medieval historian, F.M.Stenton, remarked fifty years ago:

> The development of the parochial system is the central thread of ecclesiastical history following Theodore (of Tarsus), but it is virtually ignored by contemporary writers. [21]

In the late 1980s, this began to change, with the gradual emergence of 'parish studies' from social historians for whom the parochial became a key to opening and understanding the dynamics of late medieval and early modern community life. Susan Wright's 1988 collection *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay*

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[15] Hooker, *Laws,* Book 5:80:2. Hooker dates the organisation of pastoral cures to 'about the year 112'.
[16] See, for example, Godfrey *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.310; P.D.Thompson, *Parish and Parish Church* (London, Thomas Nelson, 1948), p.54.
[17] Such is Adrian Hastings' assertion in *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge, CUP, 1997), c.2.
[18] John Godfrey, *The English Parish 600-1300* (London, SPCK, 1969). Hooker's attribution of a primitive (i.e. early second century) date for the local principal of church organisation endorses this assertion. Hooker, *Laws*, Book 5:80:2.
[19] Smith, Cook and Hutton's disclaimer 'we do not really know how the English parish originated' is typical. In *English Parish Churches* (London, Book Club Associates, 1977), p.14.
[20] Cf. Jones, *Parish,* p.15.
[21] F.M.Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, OUP, 1947), p.157.

Religion 1350-1750 and Katherine French's *The Parish in English Life, 1400-1640* from 1997 have been particular influential in this respect.

However, aside from classic works such as Toulmin Smith's *The Parish* (1854) and W.E. Tate's *The Parish Chest* (1969), which examined its legal responsibilities and civil administration, there have been few works of substance that have considered the parish system's underlying ethos and purpose.[22] The important collection of interdisciplinary essays edited by Giles Ecclestone, *Parish Church?* (1988) and an earlier study, P.D.Thompson's *Parish and Parish Church* (1948), are exceptions, the latter proving especially useful in analysing how the parish system combined both church life and civil government, in its responsibility for local welfare. This communal role has been thoroughly appraised – in terms of local history, if not theology – in N.J.G.Pounds' magisterial *A History of the English Parish* (2000), which to some extent filled a long-vacant place for a single volume parochial history, together with Anthea Jones' more popular-level, but nonetheless useful celebration *A Thousand years of the English Parish*, published in the same year. The principle shortcoming of Pounds' survey is its conclusion at the end of the nineteenth century, leaving the parish's place in twentieth century social history relatively unexamined, although several important local studies have appeared the last thirty years – notable among them being Jeffrey Cox's *English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870-1930* (1982); *Religion and Urban Change: Croydon, 1840-1914* by Jeremy Morris (1993) and Rex Walford's pioneering recent work on Middlesex, *The Growth of 'New London' in Suburban Middlesex and the Response of the Church of England* (2007).

Historical accounts aside, the Postwar period saw a flurry of books - Joost De Blank's *The Parish in Action*, for example - that sought to address the parish in missionary terms at a time when, if Callum Brown (2001) is to be believed, the British church was beginning to slide into terminal decline.[23] Central to the ideal they defend is the unique historical place of the established church in its 'cure of

[22] Katherine French's reflection that:'the complex matrix of religious, secular and cultural factors contributing to the idiosyncratic character of some 9000 local communities is a most promising area for future research' is common in the historical literature. In *The Parish in English Life*, p.13.
[23] Cf. Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London, Routledge, 2001), c.8.

souls' for all parishioners, which remains a vitally important strand of parochial theology and one with deep historical roots in the origins of English nationhood. In the same period began what Harbison (1992) calls a 'vast avalanche' of books about England's parish churches.[24] Essentially gazetteers for church-spotters, of which John Betjemen's *English Parish Churches* remains the standard, these often contain introductory reflections of interest to the broader place of the parish church in the English natural and social landscape.

The inherent bond – appraised in Chapter Four - between parochial ministry and the Church of England's status as established in law is a relatively unmined seam in parochial theology – an exception being Sarah Coakley and Sam Wells' *Praying for England* (2008), which persuasively affirms the continuing value to the nation of parish priest and parish church as the celebrants of, in Rowan Williams' phrase, 'what will not fit anywhere else'.[25] In reaction to perceived threats to the viability of the parish system[26] the last decade has seen a growing harvest of literature that – like Coakley and Wells' work - has begun to plough more deeply into the theological and social significance of the parish. Following the aforementioned study *Parish Church?* (1988), the principle works here have been *The Parish*, edited by Malcom Torry (2004) - a volume of essays by ministerial practitioners working in South London; *The Future of the Parish System* (2006), another collection, consciously engaging with the often anti-parochial 'Fresh Expressions' movement and Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank's *For the Parish* (2010), an eloquent apologetic for the enduring value of parochial ministry. Echoing these in more personal and narrative form are books – Roger Scruton's *Our Church* and Roy Strong's *A Little History of the English Country Church* being two prominent examples – that appear as elegies for a particular kind of secular Anglicanism.

Nevertheless, few of these studies attempt any thoroughgoing engagement with what De Soja (1989) called the 'reassertion of space' in social theory in recent

[24] In *England's Parish Churches* (London, Aurum Press, 2006), p.15.
[25] Samuel Wells & Sarah Coakley, *Praying For England* (London, Continuum, 2008) p.181.
[26] Either as a model for mission (following the influential Church of England report *Mission-Shaped Church*) or as a financially sustainable pattern for the deployment of ministry.

decades[27], a development that has only lately begun to send ripples through practical theology, as evinced by John Reader and Chris Baker's study *Encountering the New Theological Space* (2009).[28] Whilst the 'geographical turn' in social theory is bringing in its wake a renewed appreciation of locality and 'place' within Christian theology, this has, as yet, found only limited application to the study of the parish. A seminal work in the development of the emerging discipline of place-theology has been Walter Brueggemann's *The Land* (1977), his study of 'place' as a motif in the Old and New Testaments, which drawing upon W.D.Davies' earlier study (1974) *The Gospel and The Land* provides a fascinating theological reflection on place as a governing motif in scripture. According to Brueggeman, land in scripture is always 'storied place'[29] - personalised locale, dependent on the experience of God's presence, promise and call.

This narrative understanding of place in relation to God is taken up in John Inge's pioneering study *A Christian Theology of Place* (2003). For Inge, a Christian understanding of place has a sacramental quality that stems from his doctrinal conviction that, in Jesus Christ, created space-time becomes imbued with the presence of God. Inge is particularly helpful in examining the classical metaphysics of *topos* in Greek thought, which contributes to his theological description of place as 'the seat of relations…between God and the world'. [30] This is a pivotal insight amidst the definitions of place abounding in the extensive library of geographical and social studies on this theme, in which the work of Doreen Massey has proved to be of particular significance for this research. Her recognition, not only that space is socially constructed (following Berger and Luckmann), but that society is *spatially constructed* is, Massey (1985, 2005) explains, one of the leading social scientific developments in recent times.[31] This post-historicist outlook has been greatly influenced by French writers such as Pierre Bourdieu and Henri Lefebvre – the latter's *Le Production de L'Espace* (1991) presenting space, not as a static concept, but something 'produced' by

[27] The subtitle of his *Postmodern Geographies* (London, Verso, 1989).
[28] (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2009), pp.7-8.
[29] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (London, SPCK, 1978), p.185.
[30] John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003), p.68.
[31] C.f. Derek Gregory & John Urry, *Social relations and Spatial Structures* (London, Macmillan, 1985), pp.2-12 and Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London, Sage, 2005), c.1.

human agency. Lefebvre's case found echoes in Michel De Certeau's seminal volume *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), in which he describes how social 'place' is formed by ordinary activities such as walking to work and eating meals, all of which shape the social context. As such, spatial practices have huge ethical and political import: a significant theme in this research.

Alongside John Inge's monograph on the explicitly theological dynamics of place must be included a number of other studies by Philip Sheldrake (2001), David Brown (2004) and Mark Wynn (2009), each of which follows a similar – that is, broadly sacramental – approach, whilst providing a welcome and necessary redirection of focus away from church buildings or more generally ecclesial notions of sacred space.[32] As such, they have a certain amount in common with doctrinal works, which, whilst only tacitly addressing the theme of place, offer valuable theological scaffolding for its development. Karl Barth's *Dogmatics* (especially volume three), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (his *Ethics* and *Christology* in particular), Colin Gunton (1992, 1993, 1997) and T.F.Torrance (1969, 1976) have all been key influences on this research. For Bonhoeffer, the Incarnation binds the church to space and time in its thinking about God: a point powerfully furthered by Torrance, employing insights from physics and more recently applied to the urban context by Timothy Gorringe in his important study *A Theology of the Built Environment* (2002).[33]

Finally, in this review of the pertinent literature, is a hitherto untapped vein of nature writing that has landed on 'parish' as an essential motif for local ecology. Notable among these are works by Richard Mabey (1980) and Sue Clifford and Angela King (1996, 2006) and, most recently Robert Macfarlane (2012, 2015), which represent a fascinating recovery of parish as an unparalleled symbol of local belonging.

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[32] In addition to these works, a new volume from the United States, Leonard Hjalmarsson's *No Home Like Place: A Christian Theology of Place* (Portland, Urban Loft, 2015), usefully relates the New Testament perspective to, in particular, urban and public space.
[33] Cf., T.F.Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Oxford, OUP, 1969) c.3; *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh, Handsel Press, 1976), p.133ff.

Part I *Christ in our place*: The Anglican parish in theory and tradition

Chapter 1: The dynamics of place-formation

> Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!'[34]

If, as Coleridge wrote, 'method has to do with the relations of things'[35], Jacob's bleary epiphany at Bethel is a useful location at which to begin. For his statement not only identifies the principal relations under consideration – those of God, place and people, as interpreted within a specific human tradition – but also orders them in ways that are methodologically suggestive.

As so often in the Old Testament narrative, this episode finds the reality of God and the reality of 'place' simultaneously affirmed - recognition of the former leading immediately to the latter. Thus understood in the context and experience of divine-human encounter[36], place is perceived not merely as having an influence upon humanity's being-in-relation to God, but as being entirely contingent upon God for existence: place, in other words, has no 'being' unless the 'being' of God is first affirmed. This, according to Karl Barth, is a basic presupposition of belief in a divinely created order. To affirm the earth as created infers its dependence upon God, whilst simultaneously its distinction *from* God. For Barth, the nature of divine-human relationship is, in part at least, a question about how heavenly and earthly 'places' relate: the answer to which lies in the Trinitarian nature of God – for Barth, the means whereby God's 'movement' towards humanity 'really takes place where we really are'.[37]

In order to determine what 'really takes place' in the particular context under investigation here – that of the Anglican parochial system – there is a dynamic to Jacob's encounter with God at Bethel (repeated in other, similar episodes, such as Moses at the Burning Bush) that, whilst fragmentary and figurative, may usefully

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[34] Genesis 28:16-17.
[35] From *On Method* in *The Friend*, cited in ed. I.A. Richards, *The Portable Coleridge* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977), p.343.
[36] As John Inge affirms in *Place,* p.68.
[37] Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Creation, Part 2, Church Dogmatics III.3* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1960), p.430ff.

be employed in this methodology. The first point to observe is that, for Jacob, God's 'being' precedes his own 'knowing' – 'God is' in this place and 'I knew it not'. The 'being' of God in 'in place' is thus not dependent upon Jacob's 'knowing', but, secondly, is *revealed* to him, imaginatively – and in that revelation comes the awareness and symbolic construction of 'place'. Thirdly, this recognition of what might be termed God-in-place, is not, to put it crudely, 'any god', but, quite specifically, 'The LORD' – in other words, the God of his ancestors, as understood within his own inheritance of belief. There is, then, a hermeneutic at work in Jacob's processing of this encounter, the meaning of which is interpreted according to communal tradition. Fourthly, the recognition of God-in-place is perceived as, and results in, a call to personal action - as evidenced by the symbolic construction of place in the bestowal of a meaningful name and, crucially, in the impact of the revelation upon Jacob's subsequent practice. There is a *vocational* tenor to the encounter, which thereafter invests the place with social significance.

To a certain extent this dynamic may be seen at work in the whole scriptural understanding of place. In the Old Testament narrative, certainly, it can be argued that the primal experience of Israel was of God's *prevenience* in the territories they entered. Typically, in the Pentateuch, encounters with God are characterised by a sense of epiphany and of call ('Go from your country…to the land that I will show you', to take a primary example[38]). These encounters result in a renewed appreciation of vocation and of place *as* place: that is, space imbued with meaning and identity, as is signified by the act of naming the sites where God has made himself known. In *The Land*, Walter Brueggemann (1978) explains how the Old Testament presents land as 'gift' - somewhere promised and prepared by God for his people, the essential context for their covenant relationship. In Israel's theological reflection, Brueggemann writes, the land:

[38] Genesis 12:1.

> is not just an object to be taken and occupied. It is rather a party to a relation. Because the land is the means of Yahweh's word becoming full and powerful for Israel, it is presented as a life-giving embodiment of his word.[39]

This 'relational' understanding of place in scripture is developed by John Inge in explicitly sacramental terms, whereby God's activity in particular places and times serves to remind people of his universal presence.[40] Yet, whilst the New Testament may be seen as bringing a radical *dis*placing of Israel's faith (away from its 'over-localisation' on temple and territory), this faith is also *re*-located in the person and practice of Christ. Encounters with God-in-place henceforth become encounters with God-in-Christ: he becomes, in effect, the hermeneutic of place for those who obey his call 'follow me'. Although reconfigured both in terms of space (via the agency of the Holy Spirit, Christ may be encountered in all places) and time (the earthly locale becoming relative to the eschatological, heavenly 'home') the early Christian 'spiritualised'[41] understanding of place retains the vocational sense identified above: of being addressed by God in particular - often surprising - locations, in ways that serve to transform the call and practice of the Christian community.[42] It is this fourfold priority, then – of ontology, revelation, tradition and vocation – that will form the frame for the methodological considerations that follow.

The priority of ontology

The question as to 'what kind of place' the Anglican parish is may, at heart, be one of perception: how local contexts are viewed and how that perception is both informed by and also informs traditions of practice. Such an enquiry thus concerns the epistemological relationship between subjective appearance and objective reality - and the way in which what is 'given' to the senses is

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[39] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (London, SPCK, 1978), p.48.
[40] Inge, *Place*, p.87 and c.2.
[41] John Inge recognises this quality in the early church, in *Place*, p.57, as does W.D.Davies in *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1974), p.366ff.
[42] Peter's vision in Acts 10 being a key example.

conceptualized and, as it were, 'reflected back', mapped on to the space-time locale. In the Western philosophical tradition, this relationship has been closely allied to the question of God's existence - and whether the reality of an external world independent of human consciousness is, in some sense, guaranteed by divine presence, such that, as Descartes believed[43], physics is firmly founded upon metaphysics.

That, in effect, there is 'no place without God', had been the assumption, in one form or other, of all classical metaphysical thought - whether in the Platonic sense of the world being 'a likeness of something else'[44] originating in God, or in the Aristotelian theory of its underlying substances, which reached its apotheosis in the monadaology of Liebniz, where God is himself affirmed as the 'supreme substance', from which all others proceed.[45] Yet, whilst trading on a kind of divine collateral that underwrote the mind's ability to perceive truth, rationalism's essentially deistic, impersonal view of God allowed for his effective detachment from the act of knowing. In the face of the empiricist reaction of the eighteenth century, the assumed basic coherence of God, the rational mind and the external world could, therefore, not be sustained – so that, for Hume, all *a priori* foundations to knowledge, divine or otherwise, were 'building entirely in the air'.[46]

It was the achievement of Immanuel Kant to synthesise these antithetical strands in European thought. Neither sense experience nor *a priori* understanding could alone provide a satisfactory basis for knowledge of the world: rather the two worked in conjunction, the former being filtered by the latter and the prior concepts and categories it employs to interpret sense data. For this priest to look from his study window and 'see' parish, for example, requires the application of prior judgments to sense experience, which arrange what is seen into

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[43] Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1960) pp.60-67.
[44] Plato, *Timaeus and Critaeus* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977), p.41.
[45] While revolutionary for the modern understanding of physics, Liebniz's 'perspectiveless' depiction of divine involvement in the world arguably allowed the empiricists to dispense with a divine being who is, in essence, *unrelated* to the world. Cf Liebniz, *Philosophical Writings* (London, J.M.Dent, 1961) p.10ff.
[46] Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis, Hackett, 1998), p.64.

recognizable forms of thought. The act of knowing, in other words, applies 'internal' concepts to the 'external' world. Crucially, however, Kant saw this reunion of subject and object, sensibility and understanding as being possible only insofar as objects of our perception appear to the individual. Whilst affirming that 'the world is as we think it'[47], this was only true with respect to the *phenomenal* world: the one presented to human senses. As Kant writes:

> When therefore we say, the senses represent objects *as they appear*, the understanding *as they are*, the latter statement must not be understood in a transcendental, but only in an empirical signification, that is, they must be represented in the complete connection of phenomena, and not according to what they may be… as objects of the pure understanding. For this must ever remain unknown to us.[48]

The 'unknownness' of things-in-themselves - including, crucially, God - has proved to be an enduring, if often contested, aspect of Kant's legacy. Returning to Bethel under this scheme, Jacob's perception that 'God is in this place' has little objective validity, both God and place being essentially incognito.[49]

Whilst Kantian epistemology (especially as refined by later German idealists, notably Schelling) was profoundly influential on his thought, such a conclusion was unsupportable for Samuel Taylor Coleridge - the principal interlocutor in this chapter - whose writings sought to restore, within a Christian theological frame, the threefold relationship between God, human perception and the objective world or 'place'. Critical to this restoration was Coleridge's insistence on the priority of ontology over epistemology. Far from being unknowable, the external, objective world presents itself to the rational mind by virtue of its own existence: truth, as he puts it, 'is correlative to being…if we know, there must be somewhat known by us'.[50] Indeed, Coleridge draws subject and object into such correlation

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[47] Roger Scruton, in *Kant* (Oxford, OUP, 1982), p.23.
[48] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (London, J.M.Dent, 1934), p.190.
[49] Cf. D.W.Hamlyn, *The Theory Of Knowledge* (London, Macmillan, 1971), p.176: 'there is no way in which belief in an independent world can be justified once we are committed to the idea that what primarily exist are sense data'.
[50] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions* (London, J.M.Dent, 1960), p.149.

that the act of knowing is entirely dependent on the 'being' of what is known. Thus, when seeking the 'substantiating principle of all true wisdom', Coleridge affirms:

> Let it not be supposed that it is a sort of knowledge: no! It is a form of BEING, or indeed it is the only sort of knowledge that truly *is*….[51]

Coleridge developed this analysis, so crucial to the poetic sensibility, in the tangled chapters of his *Biographia Literaria*. Reworking the familiar Cartesian dictum, Coleridge asserted, 'I think *because* I am'.[52] Furthermore, he grounds this ontological assurance in *ultimate* being: the God in whom 'knowing and being are identical and co-inherent'[53]. Thus, Coleridge concludes: *sum quia in deo sum* ('I am because I am in God'). Unlike the detached and anonymous God of rationalism, however, divine presence in Coleridge's scheme was intimately involved in human consciousness:

> We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the self in order to lose and find all self in GOD.[54]

His assurance that, citing Malebranche, 'we see all things in God'[55] likewise grounded Coleridge's faith in the inherent 'knowability' of the objective world and of what he called the 'co-inherence' of subject and object – not only with regard to phenomena but noumena also. Coleridge had an abiding philosophical concern with 'polarity', believing that the differentiation of the natural world should be understood in terms of an indivisible whole, characterised by the

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[51] From *On Method* in *The Friend*, cited in I.A.Richards (ed.), *Portable Coleridge*, p.386. Cf. *Biographia*, pp.154-5.
[52] Coleridge, *Biographia*, p.152.
[53] Quoted in Catherine M. Wallace, *Coleridge's Biographia Literaria and the Evidence for Christianity* in *Interspace and the Inward Sphere: Essays on the Romantic and Victorian Self*, ed. Norman Anderson and Margene Weiss (Illinois, Western Illinois University Press, 1978), p.24. Cf. also Basil Willey, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1972), p.197.
[54] Coleridge, *Biographia*, p.154.
[55] *Ibid*. p.155.

interpenetration of opposites.[56] In the fifth of his 'theses' for literary and theological method, he writes:

> Each thing is what it is in consequence of some other thing…an object is inconceivable without a subject as its antithesis.[57]

For Coleridge, this diversity-in-unity flowed from the basis of all being in God and is perceived and received through the subjective act of faith[58] - the faith that, in the words of T.F.Torrance:

> 'sees', not with any special faculty of vision on the part of the observer, but with the powers of the reality seen.[59]

The resonance with Jacob at Bethel is clear: knowledge of the external world springs from conviction of its ontological reality, which, in turn, finds its source and head in the being of God.

The priority of revelation

From the foregoing, it is clear that knowledge of place, like knowledge of any object, is thus a matter of *perception*, defined by Robert Audi (2003) as 'a kind of causal relation between what is perceived and its perceiver'[60], critical to which is the 'givenness' of what appears to the observer.[61] Coleridge's insistence on the priority of ontology – securing as it does the prior being of what is subjectively beheld, releases this 'givenness' to mean far more than the mere presentation of phenomena to the senses: rather it draws the attention towards what

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[56] As Claude Welch (1985) has observed, in Ninan Smart, John Clayton, Patrick Sherry & Steven T. Katz (eds.) *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West* (Cambridge, CUP, 1985), pp.4-5.
[57] Coleridge, *Biographia,* p.151. Or, as Basil Willey puts it in his study of Coleridge: 'being as the basis of knowing perceives living relationship between subject and object' Willey, *Coleridge,* p.377.
[58] Cf.Catherine M Wallace, *Coleridge's Biographia,* p.24.
[59] T.F.Torrance (ed.), *Belief in Science and in Christian Life* (Edinburgh, Handsel Press), p.10.
[60] Robert Audi, *Epistemology* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2003), p.31.
[61] Cf. Hamlyn, *Knowledge*, p.34.

T.F.Torrance calls 'self-evidencing reality and revealing power' of the objective world.[62] Although he is writing with regard to scientific knowledge, Torrance's remarks are highly pertinent for the consideration of place. As he continues:

> our fundamental beliefs are … basic acts of acknowledgement in response to some intelligibility inherent in the nature of things…. but as such they pivot on the *objective* pole of the knowing relationship.[63]

Understood thus, epistemology becomes the subjective reception of, and active response to, objective 'being' – an experience, Torrance continues, which requires what he calls 'an ontology of commitment':

> for two poles of knowing are involved; the being of the knowing mind and the being of what is known.[64]

For Coleridge, the relation between subjective and objective 'being' is always both *personal* and *particular:* personal in that it is contingent upon the source of all being in God (for which he coins the term 'personeity'[65]) and particular in the sense that knowledge is grounded in the concrete specificities of time and place. Reflecting at length on 'the mere act of existing' in *The Friend*, he seeks for its 'birth-place', concluding, with typical lyricism:

> By what name canst thou call a truth so manifested? Is it not revelation? And the manifesting power, the source and the correlative of the idea thus manifested – is it not God? [66]

This emphasis on the priority of divine revelation prefigures the work of much later theologians, for whom epistemology would begin with the initiative of God,

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[62] T.F.Torrance (ed.), *Belief in Science and in Christian Life*, p.10.
[63] *Ibid.,* p.12.
[64] T.F.Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge* (Belfast, Christian Journals Limited,1984), p.159.
[65]Considered by Luke Savin Herrick Wright in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Anglican Church* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp.88-9.
[66] *Portable Coleridge*, pp.377-8.

not in human endeavour.[67] Karl Barth, particularly, finds man to be the object, not the subject of theological knowledge, whose being depends utterly upon God's creative and redemptive action. From this standpoint as 'known' and not 'knower', Barthian epistemology proceeds towards a relational understanding of truth:

> At the root of my being and from the very first I am in encounter with the being of the Thou, under his claim. 'Being' means 'encounter'.[68]

But to what extent is the experience of place to be equated with the revelation of God in Christ? The two are linked in important ways - for, as Colin Gunton writes:

> If we cannot know the spatiality of things in themselves, then we cannot begin - except as a mythical projection - to conceive of a spatial and historical human life which is also the locus of something transcendent, i.e. beyond space.[69]

In a recent study, *Faith and Place*, Mark Wynn (2009) takes up John Inge's Christian conception of place as 'the seat of relations' between God and the world, to consider how the classical concept of the *genius loci* might provide a key into human experience of God. For Wynn, knowledge of place 'epitomises in miniature' knowledge of the world in general[70], and he writes persuasively of the way in which the 'spirit of place' – the collective frameworks of meaning and memory attached to 'indwelt' locations – provides the pathway into meaningful experience of God. Viewing God as the *genius mundi*, Wynn argues that place is the way in which knowledge of God is mediated *ostensively* – in that it 'points towards' God. In other words, the way in which place is known is not only analogous to the way in which God is known, but the former gives real access to the latter.

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[67] C.f. John Thompson, *Was Forsyth Really a Barthian Before Barth?* in Trevor Hart (ed.) *Justice the True and Only Mercy* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1995), p.239: 'Knowledge of God begins not with human discovery, but God's own action in revelation'.
[68] Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Creation, Part 2, Church Dogmatics III.ii* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1960), p.247. Similarly, ''Man without God *is not*; he has neither being nor existence'. *Ibid*., p.345.
[69] Colin Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, Gunton (Carlisle, Paternoster, 1992), p.114.
[70] Mark Wynn, *Faith and Place: An Essay in Embodied Epistemology* (Oxford, OUP, 2009), p.36.

Although Wynn is keen to preserve the distinction of God and the world, the absence of sufficient Christological content from his study arguably fails to prevent it from lapsing into a kind of pantheistic equation of God with the spirit of place. If, as Barth emphasised, 'creation is the divine distinction of the creature'[71], then an appreciation of God's Trinitarian being is crucial to grasping the way in which the creator 'enters space-time and all structures distinct from himself'.[72] There can, therefore, be no attempt to consider the question of *how* knowledge of God is locally mediated without giving clear Christological definition to the answer, for it is in Christology that the theologian comes to terms with what is real - not just in time but also in space.

The priority of tradition

Whilst the ontological reality of the external world may (indeed, must) faithfully be affirmed within a Christian epistemology, the *apperception* or 'laying hold of' that world will always be subjectively conditioned. In other words, what an individual or community 'sees' will vary according to the culture, concepts and traditions that have shaped their consciousness. This filtering not only *retains* a subjective impression of reality, but also *reproduces* the world as seen and lives within that world in correspondent fashion, so that reality is always being shaped and re-shaped according to the worldview of those who perceive it.

Crucial to this intuitive process - which 'makes the external internal, the internal external'[73] – is the role of the creative imagination, which, in a much-discussed passage in the *Biographia*, Coleridge divides into both primary and secondary categories. Whilst the former is the more 'everyday' function, akin to what he elsewhere calls the 'understanding', the secondary imagination is the creative re-processing of what is perceived – a reflection upon reflection, so to speak. So

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[71] Karl Barth, *Dogmatics* III iii, p.3.
[72] *Ibid.,* p.430. Cf. Colin Gunton emphasises how Trinitarian relations are essential in order to demonstrate how 'God is able to come into relation with the world while remaining distinct from it'. *Christ and Creation,* p.77.
[73] *Lecture on Poesy or Art* in H.N.Coleridge (ed.) *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London, William Pickering, 1836), p.223f.

significant is this faculty that Coleridge mints a new word to describe it – the *esemplastic* power – literally, the 're-shaping' of reality.[74] Through this work of imagination, he writes:

> Every day we are creating or half-creating the world around us.[75]

Whilst for Coleridge this is an essentially poetic endeavour, the *esemplastic* faculty he identifies has great significance for a consideration of place-formation, echoing Shakespeare's view that imagination 'gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name'.[76] It is here that place truly begins to be formed and transformed; here that, as it were, Jacob's eyes are opened to *where* in the world he is. As John Berger (1972) explained, in his influential essay *Ways of Seeing*, there is a *reciprocity* to this process, witnessed in art, whereby place is formed in the negotiation of different points of view:

> It is seeing that establishes our place in the surrounding world … Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world.[77]

The way we perceive things, Berger affirms, is 'affected by what we know or what we believe'.[78] Certainly, the understanding that knowledge is culturally conditioned is one of the principal insights of twentieth century thought, as works by Gadamer (1975) and (Peter) Berger and Luckmann (1971) particularly demonstrate. Whilst the latter guards against any individualistic interpretation of local reality, Gadamer's thesis in *Truth and Method* is pertinent in its assertion that knowledge involves *situation* – 'a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision'.[79] The situated nature of perception leads to his concept of *horizon* – understood philosophically as 'the range of vision' that can be obtained from our particular standpoint. According to Gadamer, the horizon of the present is always

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[74] Coleridge, *Biographia*, XIII; c.f. Willey, *Coleridge*, p.196ff.
[75] Quoted in Willey, *Coleridge*, p.89.
[76] In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Act V, scene I.
[77] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972), pp.7-8.
[78] *Ibid.,* p.7.
[79] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York, Crossroads, 1975), p.269.

being formed and 'tested' by that of the past, as carried forward to us by tradition. 'Understanding' he writes:

> is always the fusion of these horizons which we imagine to exist by themselves.[80]

Gadamer's special concern here is engagement with the historical horizon, but explicitly *geographical* traditions (in art and architecture, forms of government, transport, or demographic patterns) also determine the way in which places are perceived and, in Coleridge's terms, 'half-created'. All places are, it is emphasised, produced according to the remembered associations and heuristic aspirations we bring to bear upon time and space. When studying the nature of the Anglican parish – one very specific cultural form of 'Christian place' – a complex web of influences and traditions (geography, history, national identity, liturgy, and so on) have combined to enable place to be 'seen' in a quite particular way[81] - for, as Einstein wrote:

> Whether you observe a thing or not depends on the theory which you use. It is theory that decides what can be observed.[82]

The priority of vocation

In this methodological outline it is contended that place begins to be formed in the imaginative, 'traditioned' processing of what is locally revealed to human agency in space-time. Thus, the 'knowing' of place is secondary to the 'being' of place, which finds its ground in the creative action of God - which, likewise, emerges from his prior existence. Furthermore, because it is overtly *situated* knowledge – both in the above meaning of being shaped by narrative and in geographical terms as pertaining to a specific locale – knowledge of place is, in

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[80] *Ibid.,* p.273.
[81] Giles Ecclestone suggests that the parish is often an 'idea in the mind' rather than 'a description of what is actually happening'. *Parish Church?* p.5.
[82] Quoted in T.F.Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence*, p.115. In similar vein, Willey explains Coleridge's 'secondary imagination' thus: 'we see what we deserve to see, what our eye brings means of seeing'. In *Coleridge,* p.198.

the Aristotelian sense, a 'practical wisdom', only reached 'through' an experience of each particular location.[83] Indeed, place requires both *phronesis* and *praxis,* only being known insofar as it is indwelt or enacted. There is much resonance here with Michael Polanyi's groundbreaking work on scientific epistemology, which argues that the intuitive, *fiduciary* dimension is foremost in all genuine enquiry, as evoked by his maxim, 'we know more than we can tell'.[84] Thus understood, knowing is an act of faith that reaches beyond the boundaries of self towards each glimpse of ultimate reality that apprehends us. Critical here is the contention that, because all knowledge is *personal* (that is, rooted in a particular space-time context), ultimate or universal truth 'finds us' only via our concrete particularity – our locality, in other words. Against the prevailing inductive methodology, Polanyi writes that:

> Critical philosophy would reduce all our convictions to the mere products of a particular location and interest. But I do not accept this conclusion ... I accept these accidents of personal existence as the concrete opportunities for exercising our personal responsibility. The acceptance is the sense of my calling.[85]

This 'calling' allows a person to transcend the limitations of circumstance, he concludes:

> because we hope to be visited by powers for which we cannot account in terms of our specific capabilities. This hope is a clue to God…[86]

The knowledge of place, it may be asserted, has a similarly *vocational* character to that Polanyi ascribes to scientific endeavour: one in which the reality of being elicits a particular kind of social response or 'traditioned action'. The tension between 'act' and 'being' is, Dietrich Bonhoeffer considered, at the heart of all theology and philosophy and is embodied in the very word 'ontology', which, as Martin Marty explains, in a gloss on Bonhoeffer: 'rests on the conviction that

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[83] Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics* (Oxford, OUP, 1980), p.146. As Aristotle writes: 'practice is concerned with particulars'. *Praxis* will be employed here in this phronetic sense.
[84] Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (London, University of Chicago Press, 1966), p.4.
[85] Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (New York, Harper & Row, 1962) p.324.
[86] *Ibid.,* p.324. In this spirit, cf. John MacMurray, *The Self as Agent* (London, Faber, 1991), p.31.

logos must surrender its claim to supremacy'.[87] According to Bonhoeffer, the theological unity of act and being is made concrete in the person of Christ, whose life is given social, spatial form by the church.

As will be seen in the Chapter Three, the way in which enacted narratives shape the space-time locale has been a signal theme in social theory in the last fifty years[88]. Different social practices have been recognised as having different spatial consequences, such that cultures continually make and re-make - and are themselves remade by - the places they inhabit. One never, to adapt Heraclitus, stands in the same place twice. Place-formation - by which is meant the practices and symbolic frameworks of meaning that arise from indwelling any space-time locale – proceeds, then, from an imaginative interplay between the ontology of the place and its perception and reconstruction by local society. This dynamic process will form a model for the description of the Anglican parish that follows. In its light, 'parish' may be seen as one cultural type of spatial production, shaped by and also shaping a specific understanding of the Christian vocation. Having in this way sketched the methodological contours of such a view, the next chapter will explore how the ontology and revelation of Jesus Christ gives it concrete theological definition.

[87] Martin E. Marty, *The Place of Bonhoeffer* (London, SCM, 1963), p.93.
[88] Eriksen writes: 'the person is a social product but society is created by acting persons'. In Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology* (New York, Pluto Press, 2010), p.79.

Chapter 2: Place in Christological perspective

The previous chapter considered that, in Christian theology, the reality of God is intertwined with the reality of place. God is, so to speak, locally mediated and there is no divine revelation in time that is not also a revelation in place. It follows that there are profoundly local implications for Christian belief and that the English parish, as one tradition of theology and local practice, is both formed by and gives form to, this understanding. In the present chapter, the question of God's local revelation will focus on the person and place of Jesus Christ - described by T.F.Torrance as '*the place* in all space and time where God meets with man in the actualities of his human existence'.[89] It will therefore be approached primarily in terms of 'who' rather than 'how'. Following Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the main interlocutor in this chapter, taking the latter route can arrive at a 'dislocated' theology that denies the historical and geographical particularity of Jesus Christ, which is vital to affirm.[90] Christology may thus be seen as the consideration of God's *locatedness* within the world and the Christian church as what Bonhoeffer calls:

> the place, in other words, the space in the world, at which the reign of Jesus Christ over the whole world is evidenced and proclaimed.[91]

If the concern of the church is, therefore, not simply to establish its own space in the world, but to point to the renewal of all reality in Christ, then it must understand its distinctive contribution to the places that it is 'for'. In his essay 'On being the church for the world' Lesslie Newbigin observed how:

> In the New Testament, the church is always and only designated by reference to two realities: one … God in Christ; and the other, the place where the church is.[92]

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[89] T.F.Torrance, *Incarnation*, p.75 (my italics).
[90] *Christ the Center*, p.30ff. As Jaroslav Pelikan frames it in his perceptive appraisal of Bonhoeffer's Christology: 'The mystery of the real presence of Jesus Christ is the mystery of the Who and the Where, and it dare not be distorted into the mystery of the How'. In Martin E. Marty (ed.), *The Place of Bonhoeffer* (London, SCM, 1963), p.157.
[91] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (London, SCM, 1964), p.202.
[92] In Ecclestone (ed.), *Parish Church?* p.28.

The main task of this chapter will be to consider how these two designations relate: specifically, how the doctrine of the Incarnation gives distinctive focus and frame to the resulting topography of the church.

Christology and place: preliminary observations

The Nicene affirmation that the 'one Lord, Jesus Christ' is 'of one substance' with God the Father indicates the full presence of God within created reality. Given that this same Lord is also the eternal word through whom all things were made, there is an inherent bond between Christology and the doctrine of creation, as Athanasius underlined:

> For the first fact you must grasp is this: the renewal of creation has been wrought by the Self-same Word Who made it in the beginning.[93]

Christology thus becomes the focus of theology's quest to understand how the reality of God and the reality of the world exist in relation to each other, raising questions of their distinction and their union. As Colin Gunton puts it:

> 'God creates' means there is reality other than God. The next question is how the two relate.[94]

This makes the concept of 'mediation' the key to understanding the relationship between God and the world. Whilst to uphold the Nicene *homoousion* is to insist upon the action and presence of *God* within his creation, the corresponding (Constantinopolitan) emphasis on the full *humanity* of Christ impels doctrine to home in from 'creation' in general to the particular life of the man Jesus.[95] In the specific history and culture of Jesus' earthly life, and the precise nature of his death and resurrection, the universal God 'particularises' himself. Thus, Jesus

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[93] St Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (London, Mowbray, 1982), p.26.
[94] Colin Gunton (ed.), *Trinity, Time and the Church* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000), p.80.
[95] The doctrine of the incarnation means, Rowan Williams and Richard Bauckham attest, not that God became 'man', but 'God became *this* man'. In Christina Baxter (ed.), *Stepping Stones* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), p.28.

Christ becomes the *locus* of God's loving identification with his world: not a general principle, but the definitive mediating point between divine and created life.

Christ may therefore be seen as resolving the fundamental tension at the heart of the biblical understanding of place, in which it is, as Brueggemann (1978) argues, both *promise and problem*. The Garden of Eden marks the essence of 'Godly place' and yet the Lord's very first response to human sin is also expressed in locational terms - immediately after the fall, God asks of Adam and Eve '*where* are you?'.[96] Thereafter the testimony is both of a lost place with God that was Eden, and yet - via the covenant - the promise of a new homeland and the hope that, as the psalmist sings, 'I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living'.[97] Thus, the land both exemplifies God's gift and yet also encapsulates the idolatry of Israel's faith, at which point in the scriptural narrative, judgement intervenes. Surveying the biblical record, Brueggemann writes:

> In the Old Testament there is no timeless space but there is also no spaceless time. There is rather storied place, that is a place which has meaning because of the history lodged there ...This means that biblical faith cannot be presented simply as an historical movement indifferent to place ... And for all its apparent 'spiritualizing', the New Testament does not escape this rootage ... He (God) is Lord of places as well as times.[98]

In the New Testament, human encounter with the divine is still in particular locations - the Mount of Olives, the Damascus Road and so forth. In Jesus' teaching, however, Israel's faith had become 'over-localised' around homeland and temple and must be re-imagined in terms of the Kingdom of God: not a territorial domain, but a spiritual reality. This radical *displacing* of belief does not divorce people from the land, rather transform the way they are to live in it. The need for a home in the world - a rooted and just society for all - is embraced by Jesus, but in paradox. The way home is through death and loss, giving up one's

[96] Genesis 3:9.
[97] Psalm 27:13.
[98] *The Land,* p.185.

place for God's sake in order to find it again, in a form of eschatological belonging revealed as the New Jerusalem. Here, 'Land's End', as it were, is reached as the Holy City, descends from heaven to earth.

According to W.D.Davies (1974), the processing of the Jewish attachment to territory was one of the most complex theological tasks faced by the early church[99], which needed to balance the tension between, on the one had, the need for faith in Christ to *transcend* the land and yet also *attend* to it, as the location of God's revelation. As Davies writes:

> The need to remember the Jesus of History entailed the need to remember the Jesus of a particular land. Jesus belonged not only to time, but to space; and the space and spaces which he occupied took on significance, so that the *realia* of Judaism continued as *realia* in Christianity. *History in the tradition demanded geography*.[100]

The downgrading, so to speak, of place in the early church, was, Davies argues, the inevitable result of the need for Christianity's existence as a local sect to express Christian faith in universal terms; with the consequence that this could not fail to place the 'local' in shadow:

> Any local or geographic particularistic elements in Judaism could not but be regarded as insignificant, or at best secondary, and could safely be overlooked.[101]

Nevertheless, the geographical particularity of Christ meant the resulting tendency to a placeless, disembodied spirituality - despite, it may be added, the best efforts of Neo-Platonism – had to remain firmly tethered to space and time, such that:

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[99] W.D.Davies, *Gospel and Land,* p.5.
[100] *Ibid.,* p.366 (my italics).
[101] *Ibid.,* p.4. Thus, of the early believers it could be written: 'Every foreign land is their native place, every native place is foreign'. 'The Epistle to Diognetus' in H.Bettenson (ed.) *The Early Christian Fathers* (Oxford, OUP, 1956), p.74.

> To do justice to the personalism of the New Testament, that is, its Christo-centricity, is to find the clue to the various strata of tradition that ... reveal their freedom from space and their attachment to spaces.[102]

This tension between transcendence of, and attention to, place, mirrors that between *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia,* which may be seen as representing the Christological task. As Colin Gunton notes, entire worldviews rest on whether one places most weight upon Christ's full divinity or upon his full humanity[103] and on the way in which the two natures are understood to relate to each other. The positive and lasting gain of Chalcedon, through a negative process of ruling out either their confusion or separation, was to define the creative centre of orthodox debate, and, in effect, to preserve the mystery of 'how' God and man might be so conjoined.[104]

T.F.Torrance (1969) has demonstrated how the process that led to this credal resolution involved the re-thinking and even abandonment of previous philosophical categories – especially those relating to place and space. Not only did the Incarnation invalidate the traditional Platonic separation between the visible world of time and space and the 'intelligible' world of unchanging forms; it also stretched to breaking point the prevailing, Aristotelian, concept of *topos* or 'place', as that which 'contains' each object or body. In defending the Nicene *homoousion*, Torrance contends that Athanasius had to work out a conception of space which 'made room' for God within physical existence, without effectively confining him to it; one where the Son of God:

> entered our human space and became man, without leaving God's 'place' and without leaving the universe devoid of his presence and rule.[105]

The Incarnation thus required a new kind of topological language: a more dynamic conception of space and place, whereby God is neither 'sealed off' from

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[102] Davies, *Gospel and Land,* p.367.
[103] *Trinity, Time*, pp.47-48. The 'Christ and Culture' debate, following the classic typology of H.Richard Niebuhr (1951) is evidence of this.
[104] Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center* (New York, Harper Collins, 1978), pp.87-9.
[105] T.F.Torrance, *Incarnation*, p.17.

nor 'sealed in' to his world. Instead, space and time must be understood in terms of the relationship between creator and creation in Jesus Christ, where they become:

> the chosen form of God's interaction with nature in which he establishes an intimate relation between creaturely human being and himself. Here space and time provide the rational medium within which God makes himself present and known to us.[106]

Torrance concludes that, while we are thus bound to space and time in all relations with God, earthly place becomes 'infinitely open' to the divine in Christ, which may be seen as a radical challenge to what Lily Kong (2001) describes as the two 'general spatial orientations' evident in the study of world religions, the 'locative' and the 'Utopian':

> The former is fixed, bounded, and requires the maintenance of one's place and that of others in a larger scheme of things; the latter is unbounded and unfixed to any particular location, breaking out of a prevailing social order.[107]

Despite this bursting of the bounds within patristic theology, Aristotelian cosmology came to dominate the medieval worldview, which ensured that the church in the West continued to wrestle with how an infinite God might be accommodated within finite reality. Particularly significant for this consideration of place and locality is the divergence found at the Reformation between Lutheran and Reformed Christology. The Lutheran emphasis was on the inherent 'haveability' of God: drawing on the patristic doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, it insisted that, in the man Jesus, the eternal God is made wholly present for us. Thus, when Calvinist theologians, from a more Antiochene stance, spoke of the Son or Word of God becoming incarnate without abandoning his 'place' in heaven, Lutherans could parody this as the '*extra Calvinisticum'*, inferring that some part of him was 'left outside' in Reformed thought.

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[106] *Ibid.,* p.24.
[107] Lily Kong, 'Mapping 'new' geographies of religion: politics and poetics in modernity', *Progress in Human Geography* 25:211 (2001), p.10.

At stake in these disputes over the location of Christ - which became acute when considering Christ's real presence at the Eucharist – was the way in which God gives himself *for* his creation. Clearly there were pitfalls on either side. T.F.Torrance argues that the Lutheran principle of *finitum capax infiniti* resulted from asserting the presence of God in Christ within the 'containerised' notion of space and time mentioned above. As such, it risked a kind of natural theology that deified human nature in general, implying an inherent 'capacity' for eternal truth that prepared a home for Enlightenment rationalism.[108] Even when the focus remains on the person and work of Jesus, one logical end of Lutheran Christology – with its attendant stress on the kenotic 'self-emptying' of God in Christ - is that God 'lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross', in Bonhoeffer's memorable phrase.[109]

If the conflation of human and divine places is the danger of Lutheranism (and, in a slightly different sense, Catholicism), the contrasting risk of reformed Christology, as Torrance admits[110], is their separation, such that the 'being' of God with us is reduced to isolated saving 'acts', in which an essentially remote God becomes knowable only in existential moments of encounter. However, resolution of the ancient Christological problem is not found by first affirming the capacity or non-capacity of the finite for the infinite; it must be sought in the nature of the God who, in P.T.Forsyth's words:

> is not hampered by space, but can enter spatial relations without being tied to them, can exist in limits without being unfree, or ceasing to be God.[111]

Resonating with Irenaus' assertion that God 'must needs include all things in his infinite being'[112], Forsyth continues that:

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[108] *Space, Time and Incarnation,* pp.30, 41.
[109] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London, SCM, 1967), p.196.
[110] T.T.Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence*, p.279ff. Cf. also Robert Jenson on the 'excessive separation of God and world in Reformed Christology' in Colin Gunton (ed.), *Trinity, Time*, p.91.
[111] P.T.Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1909), p.309.
[112] In *The Early Christian Fathers*, p.90; also cited by Robert Jenson in Gunton (ed.), *Trinity, Time*, p.90.

> *Finitum non capax infiniti* is the principle of Deism; the principle of Christian theism is *infinitum capax finiti.*[113]

This view, which posits the basic 'roominess' of God, as Robert Jenson calls it, underlines the contingency of earthly 'places' on God, and, in the person of Christ, their participation in the divine nature. Not so much 'God was in this place' as 'this place was in God'. In order to avoid the charge of pantheism, however, such a theology of place must hold the balance between the distinction and union of Christ's two natures, which is the key to determining the distinction and union of creation and God. Such balance is not easily achieved. In his early work *Yesterday and Today*, Colin Gunton lucidly explained how Christologies both modern and classical tend to be either 'from below' or 'from above' – seeking, in other words, either a 'this-worldly' or 'other-wordly' starting point for understanding Christ. Summarising the tendencies, he writes:

> Whereas ancient thought tended to abstract Jesus from history by eternalising him ... modern thought tends to abstract him from eternity by making his temporality absolute.[114]

For present purposes, 'history' might equally read 'geography' and 'temporality', 'locality', in order to express how place can be abstracted at both sides of this Christological pendulum, each prone to prioritising tradition over ontology and revelation. As Gunton writes:

> Unless God gives himself to be known ... the theologian is open to the charge of simply projecting his ... tradition onto the events, of simply idealizing them.[115]

The only way to avoid such abstraction, he concludes, is to reckon with the confession of the New Testament that:

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[113] P.T.Forsyth, *Person and Place,* p.309.
[114] Colin Gunton, *Yesterday and Today: A Study of Continuities in Christology* (London, DLT, 1983), p.54.
[115] *Ibid.,* p.31.

> In the same piece of space there are held to be present both God and man, without the loss of the deity of the one, or the humanity of the other.[116]

Emphasising that there is no 'Christ' available from scripture other than this – no theology-free presentation of the Son of Man – Gunton presses that Christology must be done simultaneously from 'above' and 'below', which inevitably means coming to terms with questions of space and time, and how God may be present within them. Thus, he concludes:

> Christology must take its centre from that place where the eternal God takes a place alongside us in time.[117]

For Gunton, the key to this 'placing' of God in space-time is found in the doctrine of the Trinity – in particular, the central role of the Holy Spirit in enabling both distinction and unity within the person of Christ and the persons of the Godhead. In this assertion he echoes Karl Barth, who, especially in the later volumes of *Church Dogmatics*, makes many tantalising allusions to 'place' without entirely pressing them home. For Barth, the Trinity is 'the way He (God) enters space and time and all structures distinct from himself'[118], and becomes the means whereby the 'movement' of God towards humanity 'really takes place where we really are', as mentioned previously[119]. In turn, Barth's dynamic understanding of Christ's humanity and divinity owes much to the Edwardian Congregational theologian P.T.Forsyth, whose seminal work *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (1909) understands the humanity and divinity of Christ as 'two personal movements'[120] of God to man and vice versa, in whose conjunction human place is saved and redeemed:

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[116] *Ibid.,* p.114.
[117] *Ibid.,* p.202.
[118] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III.iii*, p.430.
[119] *Ibid.,* p.430.
[120] P.T.Forsyth, *Person and Place,* p.333.

> God and man meet in humanity, not as two entities or natures which coexist, but as two movements in mutual interplay, mutual struggle, and reciprocal communion.[121]

The salvific effect of this dual movement in Christ, so central to Protestant Christology, is crucial to an Anglican understanding of locality, as it prevents any tendency to view the Incarnation as mere consolation – the confirmation of God's presence in the world. In Christ is found *crisis* as well as *sacrament*, contends Forsyth, because:

> The historic Christ is there to act on man and to save him, and not simply to consummate him. He is not a product of man's spiritual evolution but its grand source.[122]

Christ, for Forsyth is thus 'the locus of man's communion with God'[123], the 'central place' in which the reciprocity of God with creator and creature is realised and effected. It is just this synthesis of Christ's person and his saving work[124] that the later Barth carries forward in his doctrine of reconciliation.[125] In one of his most lyrical and persuasive sections, 'The Judge Judged in Our Place', Barth pursues God's total immersion into human locale, the baptism by which he chose:

> To share with it its place and status, its situation, by making it His own situation.[126]

For Barth, it is critical that this identification with fallen humanity is not just static 'presence', but an *act*: an *event* in which Christ takes 'our' place.[127] In the baptism of the man Jesus into our situation, each stage of the place-formation cycle essayed in the previous chapter - of ontology, revelation, tradition and

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[121] *Ibid.,* p.*336*.
[122] I*bid.,* p.334.
[123] *Ibid.,* p.341.
[124] The separation of which, Gunton notes, is a regular tendency of Christology. In *Yesterday*,129.
[125] As John Thompson writes of Barth's soteriology: 'Ontological and dynamic or functional are... not just complementary terms, but embody twin aspects of the whole reality of the person and work of Christ'. In John Thompson in Trevor Hart & Daniel Thimell (eds.) *Christ in Our Place* (Exeter, Paternoster Press, 1989), p.216.
[126] Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, *Church Dogmatics IV.i* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1960), p.215.
[127] *Ibid.*, p.18ff.

vocation – is assumed and saved; a new 'place' is formed by the incarnate action of the saviour. Barth expresses it thus:

> He has become man for us, that in the power of His Godhead He might take up our cause in our place.[128]

Central to this advocacy, Barth presses, is that Christ takes our place 'as the accused and the guilty'[129]; that God's loving movement towards humanity (from 'above' in Gunton's terms) is defined by a new movement 'from below', of humanity placed in response to God, whereby the perilous consequences of our situation are borne by the creator himself.[130] His conclusion is worth quoting in full:

> He acted justly in the place of all and for the sake of all. In their place and for their sake ... he returned to the place from which they had fallen into sin, the place which belongs to the creature in relation to God. In so doing, in His own person, He reversed the fall in their place and for their sake.[131]

The vital contribution of reformed Christology to the theology of place is perhaps a conviction that 'our' place is not as it should be – and that Christ has taken that place in reconciling action. This is an important theme to emphasise, not least because theologians of place more commonly take an incarnational route that lacks a precisely soteriological focus. The vocation of the parish – the church's attempt to act locally as Christ acted - is fatally weakened if this aspect is lost.

However, whilst Barth expresses Christ's recapitulation of the human condition in local terms - 'He does in our place the opposite of what we usually do'[132] – and whilst he insists that 'everything depends on its concrete expression'[133], the overriding impression is that place is conceived by him existentially and

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[128] *Ibid.*, p.19.
[129] *Ibid.,* p.222.
[130] John Thompson notes that Barth overcomes the above/below dichotomy in modern theology. In *Christ In Our Place*, p.216.
[131] Karl Barth, *Dogmatics IV.i,* p.259.
[132] Ibid., p.236.
[133] I*bid.*, p.16.

metaphorically rather than *geographically*. While, with great force, he presses the utter immersion of Jesus into the human situation, the spatial implications are left as just that – hinting at far more than they describe.

Ironically (and Barth is by no means alone in this), history is rarely abstracted in the same way as geography – a shortcoming of much theology and social theory in the twentieth century. Topological language – 'Christ in our place' - is often used doctrinally, especially by evangelical scholars, but invariably abstracted from any physical or social definition, in a manner that simply does not pertain when using the language of 'time'. It is part of the purpose of this thesis to assert that Christology binds the church (and Christian scholarship) to locality: roots it in the reality and particularity of place. That the particular salvation-history and geography of Jesus Christ has universal application is undeniably at the core of the Christian confession. As John Thompson writes, summarising Barth's position:

> Since God has taken man and his history into union with himself in this particular form and place, it has special significance for all times places and people, whether they know it or not.[134]

If so, a great deal rests on the bridge from particular to universal. Thompson describes Barth's approach to this crossing in narrative terms – the history of God's movement towards humanity is 'primal history', but 'with a particular historical manifestation'.[135] This manifestation - the specificities of the life of Jesus Christ – happened 'once upon a time', yet both embraces and transcends all life and history.[136] As T.F.Torrance investigated in *Space, Time and Resurrection* (1976), this paradox of 'embrace' and 'transcendence' is encapsulated in the Ascension of Christ, about which more will be said below. Suffice it to say at this point that Christ's particular humanity – his space-time existence – is not considered by Anglicans to have been shed like a husk at the Ascension, but remains, as it were, 'local', a conviction Richard Hooker affirmed in his *Laws*:

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[134] Thompson, *Christ in Our Place,* p.218.
[135] *Ibid*., p.218.
[136] *Ibid.,* p.219.

> The substance of the body of Christ hath no presence, neither can have, but only *local*.[137]

The human form of Christ means, continues Hooker, lyrically quoting Augustine, that 'he spreadeth not out himself into all places', but must 'be restrained and tied to a certain place'. [138] Nevertheless, Hooker exhibits the inevitable tension of affirming this essential locality with its equally essential universality - and one senses the bonds straining as he writes:

> The manhood of Christ may *after a sort* be everywhere said to be present, because that Person is ever where present, from whose divine substance manhood nowhere is severed.[139]

But the question remains, *in what 'sort' is Christ everywhere? Where is he to be found?* Such a question inevitably leads to consideration of the nature of the church, whose role as 'place-maker' in the Anglican tradition is a central theme of this thesis. In order to answer it, three twentieth century approaches to the church's place 'in Christ' will be sketched, before making some tentative doctrinal conclusions.

Christ the sacramental place

In the emergence of 'place' as a coherent strand within academic theology, it is, perhaps unsurprisingly, the sacramental approach that has been predominant. In *A Christian Theology of Place*, John Inge (2004) observes how twentieth century sacramental theology has focused on the idea of Christ as sacrament: *the* visible and outward sign of God's presence. At Jesus' own institution, this presence is

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[137] Richard Hooker, *Laws, 5:15:6* (London, J.M.Dent & Sons, 1954), p.221 (my italics).
[138] *Ibid.,* p.222.
[139] *Ibid*., p.223 (my italics).

'extended' in the sacraments of the church so that all created things might reveal him.[140] As Teilhard de Chardin, writing in 1917, expressed it:

> The effect of the priestly act extends beyond the consecrated host to the consecrated host to the cosmos itself ... the entire realm of matter is slowly but irresistibly affected by this great consecration.[141]

By the time of his later work *Hymn of the Universe,* Teilhard had developed this early conviction, to the extent that he can conclude:

> At the touch of the supersubstantial Word the immense host which is the universe is made flesh. Through your own incarnation, my God, all matter is henceforth incarnate.[142]

Drawing this sacramental principle into a more recognisably Anglican frame of reference, William Temple's substantial work *Nature, Man and God* (1934) affirmed Christianity's basic 'materialism':

> By the very nature of its central doctrine Christianity is committed to a belief in the ... reality of matter and its place in the divine scheme.[143]

In Christ, Temple continues, earthly locale becomes the 'the condition' of the possibility of 'special' (i.e. particular) revelation[144], and thus sacramental of God himself.[145] This radial movement from the particular *locus* of God's presence in Christ to – via the church - his presence in all creation echoes with Bonhoeffer's view that God's presence is never, as it were, 'self-contained', but always

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[140] Inge, *Place*, 59-67. Cf also John Macquarrie on 'Incarnation as the root of the sacramental principle' in David Brown and Ann Loades (eds), *Christ: The Sacramental Word* (London, SPCK, 1996), c.1.
[141] Recalled by Teilhard de Chardin in *Hymn of the Universe* (New York, Harper & Row, 1961), p.7.
[142] *Ibid.*, p.17.
[143] William Temple, *Nature, Man and God* (London, Macmillan, 1949), p.478.
[144] *Ibid.,* p.493.
[145] Taking up the theme, John Habgood puts it thus: 'Once given, the sacramental principle can be extended to the whole of nature. Natural things can be clothed with new meaning by relating them to Christ'. In *Making Sense* (London, SPCK, 1993), 22; also affirmed in David Brown and Ann Loades (eds.), *The Sense of the Sacramental* (London, SPCK, 1995), 21. David Brown in *God and Enchantment of Place* (Oxford, OUP, 2004) sees this sacramental approach as a means of re-enchanting the whole of life.

extending beyond itself for the sake of the world. The 'worldliness' of theology is precisely the concern of David Brown in *God and Enchantment of Place* (2004), a major work in which he addresses the theme of sacramentality. For Brown, its extension 'reclaims' vast areas of human experience largely lost to theology since the Enlightenment – in particular the spirituality of place. The increasing marginalisation of religion, he argues, has gone hand-in-hand with the withdrawal of academic theology into an ever-tighter frame of engagement. Barth's insistence on the inadmissible nature of religious experience beyond a strict Trinitarian matrix is, he argues, emblematic of this gradual 'disenchantment' of the theologian's world. To redress this, as he sees it, erroneous tendency, Brown proposes a much broader conception of the sacramental:

> So far from the sacramental being seen as essentially ecclesiastical or narrowly Christian, it should instead be viewed as a major, perhaps even the primary, way of exploring God's relationship to our world.[146]

However, the danger of making a general principle of sacramentality is that it can easily lead to a kind of indiscriminate hallowing of the natural world that ignores the reality of radical evil (the 'dislocation', as it were, of man and God) and risks making the incarnation merely a confirmation of God's latent presence in all creation.[147] John Inge's solution to this is to focus instead on the space-time *particularity* of sacramental presence. Encounter with God – not least in scripture - is always an 'event' which involves the revelation of God to particular people at particular times and places. As such they are fragmentary glimpses and signs of his presence, suggesting (in Bonhoeffer's terminology), that God is both 'haveable' and 'not-haveable' in the here and now. Employing his Christian definition of place as 'the seat of relations…between God and the world'[148], Inge presses that sacramental encounters:

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[146] Brown, *Enchantment*, p.6. From a literary perspective, C.S.Lewis was concerned with a similar re-enchantment of the world in *The Discarded Image* he remarks: 'the old (pre-modern) language continually suggests a sort of continuity between merely physical events and our most spiritual aspiration.' (Cambridge, CUP,1964), p.94.
[147] Cf. Inge, *Place*, p.67.
[148] *Ibid.,* p.68.

> lead to a transformation of the place as well as the individuals and communities associated with them. The role of such places is to root believers in their faith and point towards the redemption of all places in Christ.[149]

In thus seeking to reconcile 'act' with 'being' in a sacramental theology of place, Inge preserves the Antiochene accent on distinction in Christology (between the natures of Christ, and, by extension, between God and creation), and its attendant concern to uphold the particular humanity of Jesus Christ. In this respect, we might conclude that only by acknowledging places to be *creaturely* – that is, distinct from, but dependent upon, God – can those places be free to relate to God as their creator.

As it did for Bonhoeffer, the question of Christ's local presence inevitably raises here questions of the role of the church in mediating such encounters – and to what extent it may be understood as, in Karl Rahner's words, the 'continuance' of the incarnate presence of Christ in the world.[150]

Christ the 'concrete' place

Although rarely cited in relation to the theology of place, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christology is immensely helpful in establishing its method, not least by affirming how Christian thinking about all reality flows from this source.
Starting from an essentially Barthian position on the priority of revelation in Christ, Bonhoeffer develops a concern for God's being in the midst of the world which enables the church to see divine and earthly 'places' in the closest possible relationship, and itself as the 'hidden centre' of this new reality. For Bonhoeffer, Jesus Christ is the mediator of all that is real. In his *Ethics*, he writes:

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[149] *Ibid*., p.86. Cf. also David Brown on the sacraments as the 'Place of Encounter'. *Enchantment*, c.2.
[150] Gerald A.McCool (ed.) *A Rahner Reader* (London, DLT, 1975), p.28. The Parish Communion movement is of particular significance in this respect and will be considered in the next chapter. For a good introduction and history of this movement, cf. Donald Gray, *Earth & Altar* (Norwich, Canterbury Press, 1986).

> The more exclusively we acknowledge and confess Christ as our Lord, the more fully the wide range of his dominion will be disclosed to us.[151]

The relationship between the church (the 'place' where Christ is acknowledged and confessed as Lord) and the world (the 'place' of his dominion) is thus of crucial significance in his writings, and highly relevant for our question. The grounded nature of his theology often finds Bonhoeffer returning to the word translated into English as 'concreteness', used by him to describe the manner in which Christ takes form in the world today. It is not only that the message of Christ needs to be *made* concrete by the church, but, as Bonhoeffer's biographer Eberhard Bethge points out, that Christ's revelation is *itself* concrete – tangible and this-worldly. Summarising Bonhoeffer's theology, Bethge asserts that 'concreteness is the attribute of revelation'.[152]

The desire that God in Christ should not be made 'invisible' was a motif for Bonhoeffer[153], and perhaps his main point of contention with Karl Barth, to whose theological method he otherwise owed so much.[154] The fact that scholars appear divided as to whether Luther or Barth was his primary theological influence is itself notable, highlighting the middle path he sought between the two, as explored in his second doctoral thesis, *Act and Being*. Bonhoeffer's Lutheran kenotic Christology, which insisted on the full presence of God in the person of Jesus, also reckoned with Barth's more Calvinist concern to safeguard God's freedom from the world. Thus, he can assert, in *Creation and Fall*:

> God is not bound to the work (i.e., creation), but he binds the work to himself … God is never in the world in any way except in his absolute transcendence of it.[155]

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[151] *Ethics*, p.58.
[152] In R.Gregor Smith (ed.), *World Come of Age* (London, Collins, 1967), p.33ff.
[153] In 1931, writing to Bethge of 'this absurd, perpetual being thrown back on the invisible God'. In Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (London, Collins, 1977), p.129.
[154] Cf. *ibid*., pp.131-136.
[155] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall* (New York, Macmillan, 1959), p.23.

God's transcendence is here the precondition for his salvation, and Bonhoeffer's synthesis lay in declaring that, in Christ, 'God is not free *from* man, but free *for* man'[156], foreshadowing his later ascription of Jesus as 'the man for others' - the *pro me*, who:

> stands there in my place, where I should stand, but cannot.[157]

In seeking the focus of his theology, commentators often settle upon Bonhoeffer's letter from prison, in which he confides to Bethge:

> What is bothering me incessantly is the question … who Christ really is, for us today.[158]

He recognises, however, that this 'who' question begs another: namely, that of 'where' Christ really is.[159] The simple answer to this question about the *locus* of Christ is that, for Bonhoeffer, He is *in the centre*. 'It is the nature of Christ to be in the centre both spatially and temporally', he asserts in his 1933 Christology lectures.[160] But what does he mean by this? Three aspects are suggested by his writings:

i) Christ as the new reality

In one of the most potent sections in *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer writes:

> Sharing in Christ we stand at once in the reality of God and the reality of the world. The reality of Christ comprises the reality of the world within itself.[161]

One might add, 'whether the world recognises it or not', for, as Bonhoeffer observed ten years earlier, the presence of Christ in the midst of life has a

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[156] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being* (London, Collins, 1962), p.90.
[157] *Christ the Center*, p.60.
[158] *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p.152.
[159] *Ibid.,* p.59.
[160] *Christ the Center*, p.60.
[161] *Ethics,* p.197.

hiddenness to it[162]: he stands at once in the centre *and* at the boundary of existence; the boundary lying between the old creation and the new.[163] As he writes:

> In the fallen world the centre is also the boundary… So (Christ) is in turn the boundary and judgement of man, but also the beginning of his new existence, its centre.[164]

'At the centre of human existence' is the first of three short answers Bonhoeffer gives in these lectures to his own question about 'where' Christ is, each of which is characterised by this tension between Christ as the centre of the new world but the boundary of the old. The second location is at (or 'as') 'the centre of history'. History, he states, 'lives between promise and fulfilment'[165], and, in the life of Jesus Christ, history's meaning is concealed within itself. Because the church is the place where this centre is, as it were, an 'open secret', the church becomes for Bonhoeffer 'the hidden centre of the state', a new ordering of humanity within history.[166] Thirdly – and significantly - Christ is 'the centre between God and nature' – the 'new creature'. Nature, like human existence and history, lies in bondage to decay; with a muteness (following Psalm 19) which cannot proclaim the word of God. Through the sacraments of the church, Bonhoeffer avers, nature is released to 'proclaim directly the new creative word of God', for:

> In the sacrament, Christ is the mediator between nature and God and stands for all creation before God.[167]

Summing up these fragmentary paragraphs, Bonhoeffer acknowledges that human existence, history and nature can only be distinguished in abstraction: each indwells the other and together they find liberation in Jesus Christ. The logic

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[162] *Christ the Center,* p.46.
[163] *Ibid*., p.60.
[164] *Ibid.,* p.61.
[165] *Ibid.,* p.61.
[166] *Ibid.,* pp.63-4.
[167] *Ibid*., p.65.

of God's re-creation thus flows outwards from the central presence of Christ, who is the new reality - the 'new place', one might say.

ii) Christ as the centre of the church

Much attention is given in Bonhoeffer studies to the development of his thought towards the 'religionless' Christianity outlined in *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Whilst concurring with Bethge that there is a 'broad continuity' in his Christology from the early work through to 1945[168], what changes, perhaps, is that Bonhoeffer pushes ever further the implications and applications of holding Christ to be the centre of reality. The early Bonhoeffer is quite clear that the place where Christ takes visible form is in the church, which he defines as 'Christ existing as community'[169] – not merely represented by, but really present *in* that body, which is the essential ontological bond between past and present revelation of Christ.[170]

Whilst the church is thus 'the place where being is comprehended'[171], Christian ontology is never static, but always a 'being-for', such that the Christian community becomes the place where a new relation between God and neighbour takes shape.[172] Although simply 'a bit of the world', wrote Bonhoeffer in 1932, the church is 'a bit of the qualified world, qualified by God's revealing, gracious Word'. As such, he concludes:

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[168] Bethge, *Bonhoeffer,* p.793.
[169] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorium Communio* (London, Collins, 1963), p.197. Cf. *Life Together* (London, SCM 1954), p.13: 'Christianity means community through and in Jesus Christ'.
[170] Thus: 'the being of revelation 'is' the being of the community of persons, constituted and embraced by the person of Christ, wherein the individual finds himself to be already in his new existence'. *Act and Being,* p.123
[171] *Act and Being*, p.6.
[172] As Clifford Green explains: 'since God's being is being-for-humanity, so human relationships image this in one person 'being–for-the-other' in love'. In ed. John de Gruchy, *Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Cambridge, CUP, 1999), p.116. Bonhoeffer depicts Christ as the very medium of loving relationship, who 'stands between the lover and those he loves'. In *Life Together*, p.22.

> The church is the presence of God in the world … not a consecrated sanctuary, but the world, called by God to God.[173]

Therefore, like Christ, the church is also the 'new place':

> The place where testimony is given to the foundation of all reality in Jesus Christ.[174]

Importantly, for Bonhoeffer, the space which the church occupied within the world did not need to be extended; did not (unlike Hitler's Reich), need ever more *lebensraum*; it needed only the space sufficient to proclaim *to* the world that all space and time had been recreated in Christ.

iii) Christ as the centre of the world

The church, as the 'hidden centre of world history'[175], is thus in the midst of the world yet, like Christ, also at its boundary; a clear distinction between the two being necessary precisely in order for the church to be the world's new centre. Yet in Bonhoeffer's prison writings this dialectic, so starkly defined in an earlier work like *The Cost of Discipleship*, appears to find a new synthesis - the boundary expanding to affirm the real presence of Christ in the world. Some of the clearest passages about this occur in his *Ethics*, where he tackles the Lutheran (and Augustinian) concept which divides reality into two 'spheres' or 'kingdoms' – one divine and Christian, the other worldly and profane. He argues instead that:

> There are not two realities, but only one reality, and that is the reality of God, which has become manifest in Christ in the reality of the world.[176]

The reconciliation is, as ever, thoroughly Christocentric, for:

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[173] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords,* (London, Collins, 1970), 150. Cf also *The Cost of Discipleship* (London, SCM, 1959), c.3.
[174] *Ethics*, p.202.
[175] *Sanctorum Communio,* p.146.
[176] *Ethics*, p.197.

> there is a place at which God and the cosmic reality are reconciled, a place at which God and man have become one.[177]

In his letters from prison, the boundary of this new place is pushed to its limits, such that Bonhoeffer, personally *in extremis*, can write how:

> The Christian… like Christ himself … must drink the earthly cup to the dregs, and only in so doing is the crucified and risen Lord with him and he crucified and risen with Christ.[178]

Significantly, reviewing his earlier themes in *Christology*, Bonhoeffer now wishes to be silent about boundaries and speak only of God at the centre of life. Insofar as He is transcendent or 'beyond':

> God is beyond in the midst of our life. The church stands, not at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the middle of the village.[179]

Such secular Christocentrism displays a certain kinship with the broad sacramental theology outlined earlier, but is distinctive in sustaining a sharper focus on the cross as the point of dislocation, of disjuncture between 'old' and 'new' places.[180] It thus offers an alternative, rarely explored, route into an Anglican conception of locality – one that stresses the church's role in re-locating which has become dislocated from its central place in Christ. The church's *cognition* – that 'God is in this place' - is therefore the heart of its *vocation*, as it is swept into the cascading movement of God's reconciling love for the world. As Barth writes:

> In this history (i.e. of Jesus Christ) all history has its meaning and centre ... All existence has its root there, hastening towards and proceeding from it. The history of the Christian community ... lives - in virtue of the Holy Spirit poured out thence –

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[177] *Ethics,* p.69.
[178] *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p.186.
[179] *Ibid.,* p.155.
[180] Indeed, as the church all but disappears into shadow in Bonhoeffer's final musings on religionless Christianity, it is this that saves his Christology from syncretism – a point made by Regin Prentor in Gregor Smith (ed.), *Place*, p.178ff.

> in and with what took place there. *But all creation unwittingly does the same in a wider circle around the Christian community*.[181]

This last – strikingly Bonhoefferian – sentence is key: places are 'unwittingly' disorientated from their centre in Christ, so that the church's role is essentially one of re-orientation. The boundary between 'witting' and 'unwitting' places is precisely the territory of the ecclesiastical parish - and, whilst the English pastoral context may not at first seem to offer the most fertile soil for Barth and Bonhoeffer, their Christology is a surprisingly good 'fit' for an Anglican topography. Either of them could, for example, have written this - by F.D.Maurice, a century earlier:

> The church is, therefore, human society in its normal state; the World, that same society irregular and abnormal. The world is the church without God; the church is the world restored to its relation with God, taken back by him into the state for which he created it. Deprive the church of its centre and you make it into a world.[182]

Christ the particular place

Despite its undoubted conceptual strength and utility for the Christology of place, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's overriding concern to express God's being 'for' the world - and Christ's embodiment of that stance - does run the risk of obscuring the reciprocal movement, in which the world recovers its own being 'for' God. In the humanity of Christ, earthly 'place' is re-orientated towards God – not so that it merges with divinity, but so that it will be created anew. Colin Gunton sees the renewal of God's image in humanity as central to the work of Christ, restoring our 'priestly' vocation to the whole of the earth. He writes:

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[181] Karl Barth, *Dogmatics III.iii,* p.515 (my italics).
[182] F.D.Maurice, *Theological Essays* (London, James Clarke & Co, 1956), pp.276-7.

> The human calling, as made concrete in the incarnation of the mediator is, simply put, to enable the creation to praise its maker.[183]

There is also the danger that, in stressing Christ's existential location – 'for us' - Bonhoeffer downplays his particular historical location. As with more sacramental approaches, this threatens to dissipate the presence of Christ in the world until he becomes more principle than person. The writings of T.F.Torrance and Colin Gunton are acutely alive to any Christology that might undermine the particularity of Christ - and it is worthwhile in this last section to revisit their work, especially as it relates to the distinctive role of the Holy Spirit. For Torrance, Christological precision demands careful thinking about space-time and theological boundaries marked out by the historical events surrounding Jesus Christ. In *Space, Time and Resurrection* (1976), he highlights the importance of the Ascension in marking the 'withdrawal' of Christ from visible contact, which:

> sends us back to the historical Jesus Christ as the *covenanted place* on earth and in time which God has appointed for meeting between man and himself.[184]

The historical Jesus thus becomes 'the *one locus*' where creaturely existence is reconciled to God. Far from leaving the world without the presence of God in Christ, such an affirmation directs the church's attention - as the angels did the disciples' - to the coming of the Holy Spirit, through whom we can think of Christ as, in Torrance's words, 'historically absent and actually present'.[185] In this divine exchange, God's 'place' will dwell with humanity, and human 'place' is carried to heaven. Crucially, the New Testament describes the church becoming the 'dwelling place' of the Holy Spirit, so that, Torrance claims:

> The church on earth, in the continuing space-time of this world, is the 'place' where God and man are appointed to meet. In the incarnation we have the meeting of man and God in man's place, but in the ascension we have the meeting of man and

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[183] *Christ and Creation,* p.102.
[184] T.F.Torrance, *Resurrection*, p.133.
[185] *Ibid.,* 135. Cf. also Gunton, *Christ and Creation*, p.94ff.

> God in God's place, but through the Spirit these are not separated from one another.[186]

It is here that the vital connection is made between the universality and particularity of Christ. For, as Torrance continues:

> It is through the Spirit that things infinitely disconnected by the distance of the ascension – are nevertheless infinitely closely related.[187]

In Colin Gunton's Trinitarian theology of creation, pneumatology is the essential clue to resolving the tension between God's union with, and distinction from, created reality; the Holy Spirit being the agent of 'their continuing free relatedness'[188]. Importantly, Gunton sees this agency as extending beyond the church to include the whole creation, highlighting the work of the Spirit in establishing the unique 'place' of each created thing. If, as is suggested, the reality of God and the reality of earthly place become one in Christ, the Spirit's work is to enable this union, not by a conflation of one into the other, but, in John Taylor's phrase, by 'going between' them so that each realises their distinct being *in relation to* the other.[189] By so doing, the Spirit affords local participation in the very life of the Godhead. In his influential work on this theme *The One, The Three and The Many* (1993) Gunton thus attests:

> The Spirit's peculiar office is to realise the true being of each created thing by bringing it, through Christ, into saving relation with the Father.[190]

'Through Christ' is essential, though not Christ as a broad metaphor for creation's unity with God, but the local, human Christ in all his bounded particularity. The more this particularity is perceived and affirmed, the more open a door it

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[186] Torrance, *Resurrection,* p.129.
[187] *Ibid.*, p.135.
[188] Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1997), p.203.
[189] John V.Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and The Christian Mission* (London, SCM, 1972).
[190] Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many* (Cambridge, CUP, 1993), p.189.

becomes, by the Spirit, to his universality. As the Church of England Doctrine Commission report *We Believe in the Holy Spirit* (1991) put it some years ago:

> We may legitimately infer (from scripture) that it is the Spirit who makes possible our perceiving of Jesus as the clue to the world's intelligibility.[191]

For Gunton, a recovery of the 'idea' (in the Coleridgean sense) of the Trinity is the key to perceiving the mutual indwelling of the universal in the particular, in all its forms. As with Coleridge, he sees this as a poetic, imaginative endeavour – whereby each particular thing – or locale - is perceived as being, as it were, 'open' to universal meaning. Addressing Modernity's tendency to abstract and universalise, Gunton argues persuasively for ways of seeing that recognise the bounded nature of all particulars, whilst upholding their capacity for more than they can presently contain: 'man with his mind ajar', in Elizabeth Jennings' poetic phrase.[192]

The philosopher Sabina Lovibond[193] tellingly describes this approach as 'transcendental parochialism'. Whilst she is using the term in the Wittgensteinian sense of common language having a limited frame of reference, it captures well the local implication of such 'open particularity'. Lovibond stresses that the contiguous nature of existence is not something to be overcome, but a necessary part of 'our being inserted into the natural world':

> To try to surmount it, is, in effect, to revolt against one's membership of a community ... (that results in) 'an ungrounded way of acting'.[194]

For the Christian, the openness of locality to universal presence or meaning – to God, in other words – is eschatological: always in anticipation of its final consummation. The relationship of earthly places to God is always 'in Christ' –

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[191] *We Believe in the Holy Spirit* (London, CHP, 1991), p.148.
[192] Elizabeth Jennings, *In Praise of Creation* in *Selected Poems* (Manchester, Carcanet, 1979), p.64.
[193] Whom Gunton cites.
[194] Sabina Lovibond, *Realism and imagination in ethics* in Stanley G. Clarke & Evan Simpson (eds.) *Anti-Theory in Ethics and Moral Conservatism* (New York, State University of New York Press, 1989), p.280.

mediated by his reconciling action in particular space-time – but the Holy Spirit is given as the means of that incorporation in all times and places, at once directing creation back to Christ's historical 'place' and forward to its consummation. As such, the Holy Spirit gives teleology to space-time: an orientation towards its end in Christ.[195] The church, Gunton contends, often tends to emphasise Christology without relating it closely enough to the role of the Spirit, with the sometimes-damaging consequence of 'universalising' what ought to be particular and provisional:

> It must be emphasised that, as Christology universalises, the direction of pneumatology is to particularise ... it is only through the Spirit that the human actions of Jesus become ever and again the works of God.[196]

Certainly, this is a criticism that pertains to Bonheoffer's Christology, however valuable it is for a theology of place. Despite his concern for concretion it has a tendency to abstraction, coupled with a certain eschatological 'flatness' (his useful classification of 'ultimate' and 'penultimate' things notwithstanding), which can make it hard to determine quite 'where' or 'when' Christ is the centre of reality. In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer acknowledged that 'the tension persists' between the heavenly, exalted Christ and 'Christ existing as community', but arguably never gave the former enough significance, making the Holy Spirit conspicuous by his absence.[197]

Because 'the Trinity is in the background' of his thought[198], God's real presence in Christ is in danger of becoming universalised into the kind of existential principle that undermines the very concreteness Bonhoeffer seeks - and which, in turn, risks being eclipsed: 'edged out of the world onto the cross' as he puts it. Bonhoeffer doesn't, then, entirely escape the charge of 'positivism' he famously

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[195] Cf. T.F.Torrance, *Resurrection*, pp.130-131.
[196] Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1997), p.67.
[197] Matt Jenson has remarked in a recent article how 'Bonhoeffer seems to forget completely about the Holy Spirit' in his *Christology* lectures. To restore the balance, he quotes from Calvin's *Institutes*: 'The whole comes to this, that the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually binds himself to us.' Matt Jenson, 'Real Presence: Contemporaneity in Bonhoeffer's Christology', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58:2 (2005), p.159.
[198] Clifford Green, in John de Gruchy (ed.), *Companion*, p.115.

levelled at Karl Barth[199], and a more lively complementary appreciation, both of the Holy Spirit's work and the role of the transcendent Father are required if, ultimately, creation is to be free for God and God free for creation.[200]

Conclusion

In the church's understanding, there is, then, 'no place without God' because space-time is seen first of all as relative to and contingent upon its creator. Christology forms the centre of place-theology because the church finds Christ to be the nexus of that relationship, in which a new kind of space-time - a new place - is established. The existing Anglican pathway into this theme has arguably been a broadly sacramental idea of place, whereby local and occasional experiences of God (for example, in 'holy places' or acts of pilgrimage) are particular expressions of the universal truth that, in John Inge's words 'all time and place belong to God in Christ'.[201] What sacramentalism gains by bonding credal affirmations with actual, spiritual experience, however, it tends to lose in Christological precision, appearing to prioritise (in the present schema) tradition and vocation over ontology and revelation – thus risking what Karl Barth called:

> the old error that one can speak of man without first and very concretely having spoken of the living God.[202]

Protestant theology has, by a different route, made a similar mistake – stopping short of grounding its Christological conclusions so that they are left suspended in the abstract, dislocated and thus only 'real' existentially. This becomes acute when weighing the local church's relationship to topography. In Bonhoeffer's *Christology*, the conclusions reached about Christ as the 'centre between God and nature' are tantalisingly scant; given the 'blood and soil' connotations of Nazism, he would, no doubt, have been cautious about drawing too close a tie between church, community and territory. These very concerns (no less pressing in

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[199] *Letters and Papers From Prison*, p.181.
[200] It is hard to disagree with Colin Gunton when he comments that, 'to move beyond Bonhoeffer we must return to the topic of Pneumatology'. *Christ and Creation*, p.92.
[201] Inge, *Place*, p.90
[202] Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (London, Fontana, 1967), p.54.

contemporary politics) mean, however, that a relationship must be sought between human society and the land which neither idolises or divinises the latter, nor dislocates the former from it.

It is contended, however, that Protestant Christology has great riches to offer a theology of the Anglican parish; not least in clarifying the church's response to three fundamental 'where' questions, namely: where creation is in relation to God (and *vice versa*); where the church is in relation to wider (both local and national) society and, lastly, where both church and society stand in relation to the land they inhabit. Christology 'does' this, it may be added, whether or not the church realises its formative effect; implicitly forming congregations with, on the one hand, a hard cognitive boundary between church and world and a 'lower' understanding of God's sacramental presence and, on the other, those operating with a softer church-world boundary and an 'incarnational' sense of ministry and vocation.

Whatever the shades of emphasis, the reality of the incarnation charges the church with the task of 'place-forming': a distinctive *Christopraxis*[203] creating in each locality the kind of space-time relationships that enable encounter with God. This new place is always in the midst of the old, the tension or boundary between them being primarily eschatological. Yet here, the 'privileging' of time over space characteristic of the Enlightenment has also affected ecclesiology, such that the church lacks a spatial eschatology that takes seriously the geographical implications of being in Christ. Forsyth, Barth and Bonhoeffer all employ 'place' language liberally, but never press it home in more than metaphorical fashion: Torrance and Gunton refine these basic dimensions of 'Christ in our place' with Trinitarian perspective, but this has yet to be applied to the English parochial situation.

[203] Ray Anderson's phrase, in *Christ in our Place*, c.1.

Chapter 3: Spatial theory and the praxis of parish

Thus far, it has been asserted that a Christian description of the parish may take its bearing from a particular interpretation and application of Christology. 'Parish', therefore, is not only a way of seeing 'place', but also, crucially, a way of seeing 'Christ in our place'. Further, that, whilst the latter theme has been a prominent motif within the thought of, in particular, Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the protestant tendency has been to employ Christological place-language *metaphorically*, rather than geographically, so that Christ either becomes abstracted from the earthly context or 'spread out' universally, leading to a divinisation of the entire created order. If, by contrast, 'Christ in our place' is an incarnate reality, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, his person and work may be seen as the fundamental rationale undergirding the very structure and integrity of space-time whilst at the same time preserving and hallowing the distinction between creator and created. Exploring this with regard to the physical sciences, T.F.Torrance describes the Incarnation as:

> The intersecting vertical dimension which gives the horizontal coordinates of the universe the integrative factor providing them with consistent and ultimate meaning.[204]

The assertion that classical Christology provides a basic interpretative framework for understanding spatio-temporal traditions is an important insight of post-liberal theology[205] and, in this chapter, it is these 'horizontal coordinates' that are the principal concern: in particular, the social and spatial traditions that enable place to be 'seen as' parish. In doing so, the intention is to avoid those signifiers of Christian practice commonly employed by sociologists of religion, who often assess the health of Christianity centripetally – that is, by seeking evidence of social allegiance to the church as an institution and to its core beliefs

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[204] T.F.Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford, OUP, 1981) pp.24-5.
[205] Timothy Gorringe captures this standpoint well, writing that 'Christianity brings to all debates about the structures of the world through which we reproduce ourselves…its understanding of God become flesh'. *A Theology of the Built Environment* (Cambridge, CUP, 2002), pp.2-3.

and practices.[206] This arguably misunderstands the nature of the Church of England, which tends, by contrast, to operate *radially*: that is, directed beyond itself towards wider society. To make the ecclesiological point, the church is concerned in essence not with 'the world' becoming 'the church' but with the world becoming more truly itself (i.e. 'in Christ') by virtue of the church's action and presence. This is precisely the issue Bonhoeffer emphasises when explaining that the church does not need to extend its own territory into the world: rather, as yeast working through a batch of dough, it seeks to effect the transformation of the whole – not, plainly, that the batch should all become yeast. In this parochial understanding of ecclesiology, where the local congregation is a transforming agent – a means not an end – the nature and condition of 'society' is of the greatest interest: for, as John Macmurray writes:

> Christianity remains itself as the intention to realise the universal community, which is the realisation of human life.[207]

In order to behold the parish, therefore, it is vital first to perceive the dimensions of 'local' society and the ways in which it is spatially configured. This chapter will, accordingly, begin by identifying five insights of contemporary human geography that are of particular benefit in revealing the parochial, before proceeding to consider the parish as a particular form of socio-spatial praxis.

The spatial construction of reality

In *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann (1967) asserted that 'ideas' do not live in isolation from 'the blood and sweat of general history': moreover, that they depend for their vitality on being rooted among:

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[206] Cf. Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969). Whilst Wilson defined secularisation in terms of declining *social* influence, his statistical evidence (of, for example infant baptisms, numbers of children in Sunday Schools, and Easter Day communicants) is overwhelmingly congregational. Cf. also Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2002).
[207] John Macmurray, *The Clue to History* (London, SCM, 1938) p.122.

> living individuals, who have concrete social locations and concrete social interests.[208]

Social theory must, in consequence, oppose the dislocation of cultural symbols from the reality they seek to represent and ensure that the definitions applied to social institutions are as appropriate and accurate as possible. Since their groundbreaking study was published, the 'marchlands'[209] between sociology and geography have experienced an increasing degree of collaboration, as marked by the seminal interdisciplinary collection *Social Relations and Spatial Structures* (1985). David Gregory and John Urry, the editors of this volume, contended that one damaging effect of Modernity was to separate the 'social' from the 'spatial', a dualism that meant sociology and geography tended to proceed as mutually exclusive disciplines. The zenith of this approach, Doreen Massey observes in the same volume, was reached in the positivistic climate of the 1960s, where geography was seen as the 'science of the spatial', operating by virtue of its own fixed laws and causalities.[210]

In part, this insularity may be seen as a reaction against the historicism that is such a dominant feature of the Modern era. David Harvey (1990) highlights the way in which the Enlightenment project sought to conquer and control space, as the development of mapping techniques illustrates. With the accompanying regulation of time and growing fixation with progress, space became subjected to the view that 'social science is nothing but history', as Popper defined it.[211] It is widely acknowledged that this privileging of time has itself been consigned to history, Foucault remarking over a generation ago that the Postmodern era would view space, not time, as its 'great obsession'.[212] Nevertheless, this is not simply a reversal of priorities by which space is now to be understood as the

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[208] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967), p.145.
[209] *Social relations and Spatial Structures*, p.3.
[210] *Ibid.,* pp.10-11.
[211] Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, (London, Routledge, 1961) p.45. Likewise, Soja writes of the 'the quiet triumph of historicism' in *Postmodern Geographies*, p.31.
[212] Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces (1967), Heterotopias: accessed at* http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html, 8/12/10.

master of time[213]: rather, it marks an integration of the long-held opinion of the physical sciences that 'space-time' is a single continuum, not two independent categories.[214]

The reassertion of space in social theory has thus meant an increasingly recognition that, as Henri Lefebvre remarked in his pioneering work *Le Production De L'Espace* (1991), 'Social relations ... have no real existence save in and through space'.[215] Crucially, not only is space seen to be a social construct, but also society (and indeed history) is found to be *spatially* constructed, an essential insight for grounding social theory in the particularities of local life.[216] Thus understood, locales are not 'passive', but actively generated by the routines and practices of purposeful human agency, as Anthony Giddens (1984) has argued.[217] Giddens' influential theory of 'structuration' (in which he develops Hagerstrand's theory of 'time-geography'[218]), highlights 'structuring properties' that 'bind' space-time practices to form social systems or common ways of life. These comprise not only political, economic and legal constraints and influences upon human action, but also what he calls 'symbolic orders': the more implicit structures of meaning – Christian neighbourhood, for example – that govern social conduct. Whilst Giddens' stress on the reciprocal, 'dual' nature of social systems is extremely helpful – which one might translate 'parochially' as *'parish' produces local action: local actors, in turn, produce 'parish'*– his analysis is so systematic that it can be hard to translate in more than a general way to the space-time peculiarities of different locations and social groups.[219]

For Doreen Massey (2005), this rigidity is one of the features of the whole movement of structuralism, which, although acknowledged to be one of the most

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[213] Cf. Doreen Massey, *For Space,* pp.26-29.
[214] Cf. Bertrand Russell, *The ABC of Relativity* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1977), c.5.
[215] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991), p.228.
[216] As Doreen Massey explains in Gregory & Urry, *Spatial Structures,* p.19. Massey sees this, in part, as a recognition that 'the unique' (i.e. the local and particular) is, 'back on the agenda'. *Ibid.,* p.12.
[217] *The Constitution of Society* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1984).
[218] Hagerstrand usefully summarises his position in 'The Domain of Human Geography', in Richard J. Chorley (ed.) *Directions in Human Geography* (London, Methuen, 1973) c.4.
[219] Nigel Thrift's criticism of structuration theory is partly that it lacks a sense of the *personal*: being too 'functionalist' to fully explain and interpret the concrete situations to which it is directed. Thrift, *Spatial Formations* (London, Sage, 1996), p.65.

significant contributory factors in the revival of space in twentieth century social theory, inadvertently denigrated space (especially in the work of Henri Bergson) by over-associating it with *representation*, through which, critically:

> It (i.e. space) was deprived of dynamism, and radically counterposed to time.[220]

The *dynamism* of space is a guiding theme for Massey's work, and the central contention of her 2005 study *For Space*. Three central features underlie this view: that space, firstly, is constituted by *interrelations* and *interactions*, 'from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny'; second, that space is inherently open to multiple possibilities - indeed, it defines the sphere of 'contemporaneous plurality'. Because of this, Massey concludes, thirdly, space is always being reproduced, ever 'under construction'. As she expresses it:

> It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far.[221]

The dominance of static, fixated notions of space has, for Massey, meant that it has been fettered and pressed into the service of cultural narrative and political ideology: viewed and abused as a commodity, ripe for conquest and containment. This, she argues, is to radically misrepresent space that always evades capture and representation by its very fluidity. There is a great deal in Massey's approach that is both illuminating and refreshing for an understanding of the parish, not least its emphasis on the transformational nature of local practice. Nevertheless, the question needs to be raised whether she pushes her point too far. For Massey, space is a river, ever slipping beyond one's grasp, never the same when one returns to it, never, one might say, 'ours'.[222] The danger of this position is of space never being truly or fully personal – the opposite of her intention, ironically, which is to liberate space from domination so that it may become the context for free human relatedness. Her ambivalence towards spatial boundaries, discussed

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[220] Massey, *For Space*, p.21.
[221] *Ibid.,* p.9.
[222] *Ibid.,* c.12: 'The Elusiveness of Space'.

in Chapter Five, may thus be seen as an extension of this: to be bounded, it will be argued, is a precondition of being personal, being incarnate.

The practice of 'everyday space'

In seeking to do justice to 'place', therefore, contemporary spatial theory, pursues a route through static, 'structured' interpretations of society and the more dynamic, 'fluid' concepts characteristic of Postmodernity – a tension felt keenly in current debate about the future of the parish system. An important focus of this endeavour has been the cultural significance of 'ordinary' patterns of action and interaction – what Pierre Bourdieu called the 'habitus' of 'dispositions' that informs the routines and rhythms of everyday behaviour.[223] Whilst Bourdieu does not concentrate on specifically spatial practice, the idea of *habitus* has proved to be been extremely influential amongst human geographers as a means of earthing the abstractions of social theory in their application to contemporary geopolitics.[224]

Of particular interest to parochial theology are considerations of everyday life that adjust the focus onto micro-level aspects of local social behaviour – the plain fact, as Erving Goffmann (1971) put it, 'that there are people out there moving about'.[225] In his influential work *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau (1984) has written powerfully of the way in which everyday spatial practices such as walking or eating create social narratives. Likewise, he explains, a culture's stories are inherently spatial, serving to circumscribe the 'theatre of

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[223] *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, CUP, 1977), c.2. According to Derek Gregory, everyday life depends on highly routinized interactions between people who are *co-present* in time and space. Derek Gregory & Rex Walford (eds.), *Horizons in Human Geography* (London, Macmillan, 1989), c.1.4. For Lefebvre, these follow certain rhythms that form, in his words, 'the concrete modalities of social time'[223]. *Rhythmanalysis* (London, Bloomsbury, 2013), p.82.
[224] For example, Nigel thrift, in his critique of Giddens, employs 'habitus' as the mediating concept between 'structure' and 'human agency'. In *Spatial Formations* p.69ff. Cf. Jean Hillier & Emma Rooksby (eds.) *Habitus: A Sense of Place* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005). Elaine Graham draws out this point in relation to specifically Christian social praxis, in her emphasis on the *performative* nature of faith, whereby *habitus* signifies the complex of social and historical traditions both 'inherited and inhabited' by the church[224] In *Transforming Practice* (London, Continuum, 1996), p.139.
[225] Erving Goffman, *Relations in Public* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971), p.13.

actions' defining cultural boundaries.[226] Such boundaries abound in the stories of Jesus wherein countless significant, though everyday, actions (breaking of bread, washing, journeying), become transforming signs of the Kingdom of God. More often than not, these radically challenge accepted local norms (concerning ritual cleanliness, for example) to include those who found themselves marginalised according to material parameters of religious and cultural tradition.[227]

Geography thus directs attention towards the meaning of what French thinker Georges Perec calls the 'infra-ordinary': those practices often overlooked by virtue of their sheer normality. Somewhat hilariously, Perec calls upon the cultural observer:

> Force yourself to write down what is of no interest ... what is most obvious… make an inventory of your pockets, of your bag … question your teaspoons.[228]

In a similar, though less eccentric, vein, Erving Goffman's series of popular 'micro-studies' of human community are of pertinence here, which, by their finely focused attention – for example, on bodily posture when two people meet in the street, or one opens a door for another – approach the minutiae of coded behaviour that shapes 'parochial' encounters. In *Relations in Public* (1971) Goffman describes the 'territories of the self' - the spatial protocols that, by unspoken consent, mark out interactions. He identifies, for example, the 'use space' – that which a person requires in front of them – and the 'stall' – 'the well-bounded space to which individuals can lay claim to'[229], such as the chair, parking space or, it might be added, pew.

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[226] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984), c.9.
[227] Mary Douglas notes how such borders are intrinsic to religious communities in *Purity and Danger* (London, Routledge, 2002). Robert Schreiter argues that 'local theology' necessitates a deep appreciation of cultural semiotics. In *Constructing Local Theologies,* p.78ff. For impact of poverty on material parameters of everyday life, cf. John Eyles in Gregory & Walford, *Horizons*, p.103ff.
[228] Quoted in Joe Moran, *Queuing For Beginners* (London, Profile, 2007) p.9.
[229] *Relations*, c.2.

Where Goffman's (not uncontested[230]) theories and classifications are of special interest here is in analysing the rules and norms that govern everyday human interaction. He suggests that normal conditions may be suspended in times of what he calls 'crisis' and 'festival' – scenarios familiar to all who, for example, have noticed the remarkable outbreak of cordial conversation with strangers that often accompanies extreme weather in England. Where what Goffman calls 'normal appearances' are violated, certain, coded, 'alarm signals' are given off, such as the responses in a supermarket queue (quiet huffing, looking around[231]) when someone pushes to the front.

All of which is extremely helpful in 'decoding' and making visible the often elusive quality of social life that might be deemed parochial – the habitual encounters and greetings on familiar routes to work; the motivations to adventurous love and neighbourliness that prompt a disruption in these routines. The fact that social norms are locally and historically conditioned – and may be suspended under certain conditions - proves that, to employ Doreen Massey's maxim for places, 'they might be otherwise': a fact of crucial importance in the framing of parochial space. The challenge to the parish church is thus to play a distinctive part in framing the norms that govern human interaction; to use micro-space as a means of expressing Christian neighbourhood.

The geography of home

Its demonstrably powerful association with nostalgic conceptions of place requires parochial spatiality to encompass also the private, 'interior' geographies influencing broader patterns of settlement and interaction. Whilst 'geography tends to stop at the garden gate', as David Sibley (1995) put it[232], the domestic landscape is by no means sealed off from these. Noting how homes, for example, can be as much places of exclusion and conflict as of belonging, Sibley explains:

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[230] Cf. Giddens, *Society*, p.64ff.
[231] Kate Fox gives a perspicacious and often hilarious analysis of this in *Watching the English* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2005).
[232] David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion* (London, Routledge, 1995), p.97.

> Living with others confronts us with the possibility, or not, of being an 'other'. It is not simply… a matter of being able to accept the other, but of being in his place, and this means to imagine and make oneself other in his place.[233]

Thus, the psychological and emotional need for 'belonging' and 'home' also comes to the fore in more aesthetic considerations of space and place – in which vein, de Certeau (1984) can write:

> Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read ... symbolizations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body. 'I feel good here': the well-being under-expressed in the language it appears in like a fleeting glimmer is a spatial practice.[234]

In his study *A Place to Be*, Paul Tournier (1968) has considered the links between psychology and need for place in the formation of human identity. He presses that mental and spiritual *displacement* or dysfunction cannot be abstracted from the actual spatio-temporal context in which that condition is experienced. 'Deprivation of love and deprivation of place overlap' according to Tournier; secure roots in the psyche relate directly to security in locale. He cites the childhood home as illustrative here; the security of womb, cot, room and home nurtures the child's growing ability to deal with life.[235]

Taking up this theme, in her study *The Geography of Home*, Akiko Busch (1999) highlights 'return migration', the social-scientific term for the tendency of the 'baby-boom' generation to return from major urban areas to the smaller

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[233] *Ibid*., 112. Robert Schreiter picks up on the critical importance of liminality in semiotics, noting how the sense of belonging - being 'in place' - has as its counterpart the possibility of being 'out of place'. In *Local Theologies*, p.54. Cf. also Elaine Graham on 'alterity' in Christian praxis, in *Transforming Practice*, p.168ff.

[234] De Certeau, *Practice*, p.108. Likewise, Gaston Bachelard writes that 'all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home'. In *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1994), p.5.

[235] Paul Tournier writes of how 'the place is a sort of mirror of the person'. *A Place For You* (London, SCM, 1968), p.27. Cf .also David Canter, *The Psychology of Place* (London, Architectural Press, 1977).

hometowns in which they were raised[236], a trend in which, empirical evidence suggests, nostalgia plays an active and motivating role. There is, Busch concludes:

> a host of ... *interior systems,* a network of social and cultural currents, those habits, beliefs and values that also make it (the home) function ... it is by being attuned to these systems that we might arrive at some genuine understanding of what it is that gives power to the places where we live.[237]

'Private' interior landscapes, therefore, spill out into the 'public' spatial patterns and social encounters that map the wider community, just as the latter currents flow directly into the home. Whilst explicitly communal aspirations of the kind evidenced in the appended case study are more obviously 'parochial' in their linking of personal and affective attachments to traditional modes of belonging, there is an equally close interplay of kinship, nostalgic desire ('the longing to belong') and bounded, territorial attachment in, for example, the spatial praxis of urban gangs, as recent studies have made abundantly clear.[238] Affective parochialism – the desire for personal 'settlement' - is not, it must be stressed, unique to rooted or 'traditional' communities: indeed, it may more accurately be seen as a powerful and universal motive for myriad forms of local behaviour.

Place as an imaginative construct

If, following Lefebvre, each society 'produces a space, its own space'[239], and, furthermore, the resulting social space has a plasticity deriving from the dynamic interplay of culture and locale, it follows that place is profoundly *ideological*, an

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[236] Akiko Busch, *Geography of Home* (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), p.20. Cf. also Alain de Botton, The *Architecture of Happiness* (London, Penguin, 2006), c.4: 'Ideals of Home'.
[237] Busch, *Home*, p.163.
[238] The 2008 Joseph Rowntree Foundation report 'Young People and Territoriality in British Cities' is especially pertinent here, demonstrating how territorial gangs function as an alternative to 'family and household affiliation'. http://www.jrf.org.uk/system/files/2278-young-people-territoriality.pdf, accessed 6/7/15. Also P.Jeffrey Brantingham, George E.Tita & Martin B.Short, 'The Ecology of Gang Territorial Boundaries' in *Criminology* 50:3 (2012), pp.851-885.
[239] Lefebvre, *Production,* p.31.

imaginative conception as much as a physical practice.[240] Hence the traditional geographical preoccupation with cartography which, from the *Mappa Mundi* onwards - 'a Christian metaphor in which time and space are indivisible'[241] - has revealed maps to be culturally conditioned expressions and impressions of space. Whilst, in the Modern era, maps began as mere symbolic representations of space, useless for any kind of navigation, they developed not only into representations of space as it 'was', but *prescriptions* of space, as it 'ought to be'. Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul expresses it thus:

> A map anticipated spatial reality, not vice versa. In other words a map was a model *for*, rather than a model *of*, what it purported to represent. It had become a real instrument to concretize projections on the earth's surface.[242]

In his seminal study on nationalism *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson presses that such bounded 'imaginings' (particularly the perceived bonds of kinship and affinity within and between cultures) were and remain determinative of geopolitical shifts in conflict and alignment: 'All communities', he asserts, 'are to be distinguished... by the style in which they are imagined'.[243]

That the place practised is a function of the place conceived is a central claim of this thesis, overwhelmingly evident in the English context. But how is imagination translated into action? Lefebvre writes that the construction of such social space involves a triad of relations: *spatial practice*, in particular locations; *representations of space* – the symbolic 'ordering' of these practices (a mix of 'ideology' and 'understanding' Lefebvre suggests, epitomised by the work of

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[240] Thus Massey: 'The nature of geographical imagination – our view of the world – can be of fundamental importance to how we act within it': in John Allen & Doreen Massey (eds.), *Geographical Worlds* (Oxford, OUP, 1995), p.41.
[241] Massey, *ibid.,* p.27.
[242] Quoted by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (London, Verso, 2006), pp.173-74. Rachel Hewitt notes the Romantic movement's objection to modernist cartography as being inimical to the spirit of place - epitomised by Blake's depiction of Urizen in *The Ancient of Days*, poised over the globe with a pair of dividers. In *Map of a Nation: A Biography of the Ordnance Survey* (London, Granta, 2010), pp.206-7.
[243] *Ibid.,* p.6.

architects and planners[244]) and *representational spaces*: the lived intersection of the former two, 'overlaying' physical space and sustained by 'more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs'.[245]

The parish, it is suggested, involves the integration of all three – practice, imagined concept and their intentional, lived integration. Taking up Anderson's point above, the lengthy historical process of systematising and *mapping* the parish – in particular the imposition on the landscape of borders and boundary lines – may thus be seen as an imaginative exercise, circumscribing local praxis and impelling it in a specific cultural direction. Such mapping, it should be added, must be constantly *re*imagined if it is to be socially constitutive – maps do not hold space 'still' in time, they merely represent and condition the ongoing situation of relationships.

The social formation of landscape

Cartography captures the basic interrelation of human society and physical topography – a fundamental task of geography, described by Vidal De La Blache as 'the art of not dividing what nature brings together'.[246] The recognition of this symbiosis provides an important corrective to what Carl Sauer (1996) saw as the anthropocentrism of much geographical analysis, which tended only to highlight those elements of physical space that were 'of use' to human society – what he calls its 'habitat value'.[247] However, he insists:

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[244] Lefebvre, *Production*, p.41. Lefebvre accentuates the link between physical and mental space – what he calls 'logico-epistemological space inc products of imagination such as symbols and utopias', p.12.
[245] *Ibid*., p.39.
[246] Quoted in J.B.Mitchell, *Historical Geography* (London, English Universities Press, 1954), p.325. Similarly, Doreen Massey notes how 'space, place and nature are central to the geographical understanding of the world', in *Geographical Worlds,* p.14.
[247] In this vein, Robert Macfarlane writes: 'we are good at saying how we shape place, less good about saying how place shapes us'. In *The Old Ways* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 2012), p.27.

> One has not fully understood the nature of an area unless one comprehends land and life in terms of each other.[248]

Writing from an anthropological perspective, Hirsch (1995) records the way in which landscape has long been a mere 'framing convention' in anthropology and argues that it must instead be both the foreground and background to social life. He distinguishes between two forms of landscape: the one initially perceived, and a second produced through local practice. This production of landscape, he contends, involves a relationship between 'everyday lived experience' and the 'ideal, imagined existence'.[249] Far from being the mere 'stage' or 'scenery' on which the human drama is played out, territory is, therefore, increasingly portrayed as dynamically involved in the performance, as the groundbreaking work of Denis Cosgrove (1984) and Robert Sack (1986, 1993) demonstrated.[250]

Central to Cosgrove's thesis in his seminal work *Social Formation and the Symbolic Landscape* is the contention that landscape is a - uniquely European - 'way of seeing' the natural world and the human relationship to it: 'the external world mediated through subjective human experience'.[251] Being a social construction as much as a physical reality, the land emerges as a principal medium through which human expressions of meaning in narrative, myth and memory are framed.[252] 'It is in land', Cosgrove asserts:

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[248] 'The Morphology of Landscape' in John Agnew, David N. Livingstone & Alasdair Rogers (eds.) *Human Geography* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1996), p.300ff. Likewise, Richard Chorley defines geography as a 'human ecology', which 'concerns itself with the tangible spatial manifestations of the continuing intercourse between Man and his habitable environment'. In *Directions in Geography*, p.158.

[249] Eric Hirsch (ed.), *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space* (Oxford, OUP, 1995), p.1.

[250] Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and the Symbolic Landscape* (Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998). For Cosgrove, 'terrestrial space is both subject and object of human agency': *ibid.,* p.15. Robert Sack*, Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (Cambridge, CUP, 1986); Cf. also the latter's article, 'The Power of Place and Space', in *Geographical Review* 83:3 (1993) in which Sack insists that landscape is not secondary to social process, but *interactive* in the formation of meaning that gives rise to place. Doreen Massey notes how even geological formations are not static, but constantly evolving in relation to natural processes. *For Space*, p.141.

[251] *Ibid.,* p.13. Likewise, Simon Pugh affirms that 'landscape and its representations are a 'text' and are, as such, 'readable' like any other cultural form'. Simon Pugh (ed.) *Reading Landscape* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1990), pp.2-3.

[252] An approach elaborately developed by Simon Schama in *Landscape and Memory* (London, Fontana, 1996).

> that perhaps the most deeply rooted myths are to be discovered. Indeed, the most powerful of these concern rootedness, ideas of home and belonging.[253]

Charting its seventeenth century origins in art as 'landskip', the framed portion of land that forms a fitting scene for depiction, Cosgrove describes how the emergence of landscape as an artistic idea 'had the effect of making the countryside a picture'.[254] The idea of the 'picturesque' that arose in eighteenth century art – typified by the 'Claude-glass', the small, mirrored device employed to depict the landscape, literally with one's back to it – not only introduced an artificial separation between human subjects and their landscape, but became associated with a particular view of 'landed' society, which has been subject to much criticism.[255]

In portraying landscape as, in essence, a social construct, Cosgrove arguably weakens an appreciation of the reciprocal ways in which society is, in turn, a terrestrial construction - a common shortcoming in the resurgent interest in landscape studies and one that risks perpetuating the old idea of human civilization as what Keith Thomas refers to as 'the conquest of nature'.[256] Nevertheless, his case that the natural world is the perpetual partner for narratives of human identity is of great relevance for this study, as will be seen in the concluding chapter. If 'culture' is, on one level, what human practice makes of the earth[257], over a thousand years of parochial life must surely be seen as a unique tradition and formation of social landscape.[258]

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[253] Cosgrove, *Landscape*, p.xxx.
[254] *Ibid.*, p.212. Russell Chamberlin gives a good account of the origins of the term in *The Idea of England* (London, Thames & Hudson, 1986), c.5.
[255] Cf. especially Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1973), c.4. Williams castigates this sense of detachment as morally and socially ignorant, preserving both 'the myth of the happier past' and an image of the landscape in which working communities are effectively made invisible.
[256] Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984) p.25. Thomas is referring to the prevailing view of the landscape up to the eighteenth century.
[257] The agricultural origins of 'culture' are noted by Kelton Cobb in *Theology and Popular Culture* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2005), p.41.
[258] In relation to parochial customs, Nicola Whyte affirms that 'relations are always material and social at once...human relations are created through the medium of landscape'. In 'Landscape, Memory & Custom', Parish Identities c.1550-1700, *Social History* 32:2 ((2007), pp.166-67.

Summary: the ethics of territoriality

The contemporary focus in geography has thus moved away from seeing space as a blank canvas for the temporal portrayal of human society and towards its conception as something dynamic and malleable, more akin to sculptor's clay. As such, spatial practices have profound political, ethical and ecological consequences, which practical theologians increasingly recognise.[259] Within a 'vocational' place-methodology, these may be seen as revealing or concealing the particular local calling of the Anglican parish, which is a geographical compound of territory, deeply traditioned 'idea' and committed social-ethical praxis.

The conviction that place may be 'shaped' according to vocation is, Walter Brueggemann insists, central to the Christian narrative. In an essay for the inter-disciplinary collection *Rooted in the Land*, he writes that the covenantal nature of Israel's relationship with the land enabled God's people to believe 'that this land of promise, distorted by exploitative social relationships, could be transformed'. He continues:

> This remarkable faith-claim has been decisive for Western culture. The place is not fated: it can be brought into an alternative destiny by the intentionality of the new vision-driven inhabitants. The land as a social reality… takes on a different quality depending on the attitude, conduct and policies of its inhabitants.[260]

The dynamic integrity of spatial practice, social structure and the symbolic landscape brings into sharp relief the political and ethical potency of place. Thus understood, 'everyday life' is revealed not as some thing passive, predictable or theologically irrelevant, but subject to political, moral – 'structural' forces and, crucially, the very sphere in which those forces may be resisted and reframed. Indeed, this conviction may be seen as the motive force behind the entire left-liberal narrative that has driven the reassertion of space in social science since

[259] Cf. Graham, Walton & Ward, *Theological Reflection*, c.7.
[260] William Vitek & Wes Jackson, *Rooted in the Land* (Newhaven, Yale University Press, 1996), p.125.

the 1960s, a very definite and partial account of political space that Doreen Massey to some extent acknowledges.[261] But the insights of the 'spatial turn' are not the intellectual property of any one cultural narrative and what is useful in analysing the means of production can be equally valuable in decoding spatial practice in explicitly Christian terms. Thus, the Church can learn directly from, for example, the French Situationist movement of the 1950s (and its derivatives in contemporary psychogeography[262]), in which the pedestrian activity of walking through the city was transformed - via the character of the 'flaneur' - into a revolutionary praxis, by refusing to follow the accepted paths and attending to the forgotten or demonised places. This is radical potential of place: equally, as the next half of this chapter considers, it is the theological potential of the parish.

The parish as a spatial ethic

If, in the Protestant tradition, Christ is the mediator of a new place, in which created space-time is 'called back' to God – and if this universal mediation is particularised by the Holy Spirit in all places and times, then the dynamics of spatial practice outlined above are of the greatest interest for the church. If, furthermore, the Anglican parish can be viewed as a particular cultural expression of 'Christ in our place', what is the distinctive nature and quality of 'parochial space'? In the second half of this chapter, this question will begin to be answered by integrating the foregoing with an ecclesiological approach that takes seriously the social space of the church. Specifically, it will be proposed that the parish not only represents a definite tradition of social ethics, but - to adapt Stanley Hauerwas' ecclesiological phrase - that it 'is' a social (or, more accurately, *spatial*) ethic.[263] The distinction is an important one, because - whilst its legal or constitutional character may lend it a certain, more or less recognisable, frame –

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[261] in Gregory & Urry, *Spatial Practices*, c.2. Massey here gives a helpful account of the narrative basis for human geography between the 1960s and 1980s.
[262] Cf. Ian Sinclair, *Lights Out For the Territory* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 2003). A useful introduction is found in Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (London, Pocket Essentials, 2010);
[263] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p.99.

this is secondary to the primary existence of the parish as a 'way of life', its form sustained only by certain traditions of spatial praxis emerging from a distinct theological purpose.

Whilst associated with a brand of radical North American theology that might appear to stand at odds to the 'Christendom' model of the English parish, linked as it is to the nation state, Stanley Hauerwas emerges as a most useful interlocutor when attempting to understand its particular communal dynamics. This is principally because of his concern to re-frame ecclesiological practice within what Stephen Toulmin calls 'the particular, concrete, timely and local details of everyday human affairs' – as opposed to the level of 'abstract, timeless, general and universal theories'[264], which dominated ethics after Kant. Accepting that, in Thomas Nagel's phrase, there is no 'view from nowhere', Hauerwas argues that, equally, there is no 'ethics for anyone'[265] and seeks to challenge modernity's tendency to universalise by portraying the church as an alternative tradition, whose distinctive praxis can only be understood when lived as part of a localised community. The Christian narrative, he writes:

> is not primarily a set of propositions to be believed, but is rather the medium in which one moves, a set of skills that one employs in living one's life.[266]

In *The Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle indicates that moral virtue 'comes about as a result of habit (*ethos*)', and that, therefore, 'legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them'.[267] The cultivation of virtue thus requires an ongoing work of society: a narrative tradition and the kind of community that is able to locate and sustain it. It is the development of such 'skills for living' that, for Hauerwas, binds Christian ethical formation to the communal, especially liturgical, life of the church - precisely the point at which this thesis finds value in

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[264]Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden agenda of Modernity* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.35.
[265] Cited in Samuel Wells*, Transforming Fate into Destiny: The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 1998), p.39.
[266] George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p.21.
[267] Aristotle, *Ethics*, pp.28-9.

negotiating its own boundaries. For, whilst the Christian congregation is not the focus of this research, the border between 'church' and 'parish' is of real significance, particularly when the former is viewed in Bonhoefferian terms as the place on earth where testimony is given to the reconciliation of all places in Christ.[268]

But what does it mean for the church to 'be' a social ethic? Simply put, it means to be a community formed by the story of Jesus, for, as Hauerwas writes in *A Community of Character* (1981): 'Jesus is, in his person and his work, a social ethic'.[269] Pursuing one will necessarily involve pursuing the other – hence the folly of trying to detach 'Christ' from 'culture' in academic theology.[270] Being a social ethic, then, defines the church as a distinctive society that cultivates virtue – principally, for Hauerwas, through its liturgy 'work', wherein the church realises that:

> Christians are not simply called to 'do the right thing' but rather we are expected to be holy.[271]

It is this context of (specifically Eucharistic) worship that provides Hauerwas with a unifying focus for his thought, the heart circulating a distinctively Christian form of local praxis, where ethics can be defined as 'informed prayer'.[272] This approach has been amplified by Samuel Wells, whose work goes a long way towards rooting Hauerwas' approach in the Anglican context. Responding to criticisms that Hauerwas' ecclesiology is a 'fantasy', Wells (2002) contends that Eucharistic liturgy 'trains Christians in the moral imagination'[273], citing numerous

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[268] Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, pp.200-202. Bernd Wannenwetsch notes how, in worship, this recognition 'produces' a world at peace with God, in *Political Worship* (Oxford, OUP, 2004), p.249.
[269] *Ibid.,* p.40.
[270] Hauerwas sees this a particular fault of North American Protestantism after H.R.Niebuhr and Ernst Troeltsch.
[271] Hauerwas, *In Good Company*: *The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p.156.
[272] Wells and Hauerwas (eds.), *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2004), c.1. A version, possibly, of Coleridge's 'he prayeth best, who loveth best', in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.
[273] Samuel Wells, *How Common Worship Forms Local Character*, Studies in Christian Ethics, Vol. 15, No. 1, (2002), p.66.

examples of how it does so. The simple habit of 'sharing peace' before Communion, for example:

> develops in the congregation … the virtues of mercy and forbearance … patience and courage, which help them to try once more with challenging relationships and risk rejection by trying to reconcile.[274]

This sacramental shape to Christian social ethics is further explored when Wells (2006) develops the notion of the church as 'God's companions', who, by eating together, learn how to relate and so form a distinctive moral community. The Eucharist, Wells writes, 'makes the church visible' and 'is the key to locating the church in relation to the whole of creation'.[275] Baptism thus marks the boundary between 'worlds', signifying:

> The passing over from a narrative bounded by birth and death to a narrative bounded by creation and eschaton.[276]

By grounding it in local practice, Wells goes a long way to refuting the common charge that Hauerwas' ecclesiological ethic is idealistic.[277] His work in this respect is strongly resonant of the Parish Communion Movement of the mid-twentieth century, which looked to the re-creation of English social life through the Eucharist. With striking similarity to Hauerwas and Wells, Hebert wrote in the 1930s of worship 'moulding' people in community, rather than simply laying down a 'rule of ethics'.[278] Central to this local formation was the ideal that:

> All those who live in one place should eat and drink together before God.[279]

Hebert was, of course, addressing a 'Christian England' in which the baptismal boundary was nothing like as conspicuous as it is in most parishes today.

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[274] *Ibid.,* p.71.
[275] Samuel Wells, *God's Companions: Reimagining Christian Ethics* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2006), p.129.
[276] *Ibid.,* p.57.
[277] *Ibid.,* p.66.
[278] A.G.Hebert, *Liturgy and Society* (London, Faber & Faber, 1961), p.193.
[279] *Ibid*., p.93.

Hauerwas and Wells take up the Parish Communion ideal, but the challenge remains how it may be reconceived among a largely unbaptised populace without lapsing into a kind of sectarianism. Nicholas Healy (2000), in reaction against what he sees as the 'blueprint' ecclesiologies of the modern era, which typically identified 'models' of church to be universally applied, has warned against viewing the church as an 'independent society'. The Church, he writes:

> May be a society in the minimal sense that it is a group of people who share a distinctive goal, but …(they) live out much of their lives within a society that is not Christian … and they are influenced by their society at least as much as they influence their society as Christians.[280]

Though sharing much in common with Hauerwas in his desire for a 'concrete' ecclesiology, Healy is concerned that the 'Yale School' downplays the extent to which this is formed through engagement with the non-church world. Maintaining that the 'character' of a congregation is particular to its cultural setting, he suggests that a process of ecclesiological ethnography might be applied in each parish, to tease out the points at which that character has been shaped in this symbiotic relationship between church and place.[281]

Can a church established in law, whose local and national forms are closely allied to secular authority, be a truly distinctive social ethic? In a significant recent paper directly addressing the English parochial context[282], Hauerwas writes favourably of the parish as a 'form of resistance' to the 'false universals' of secular power, whilst maintaining his opposition to 'Constantinian' models of church. To do so, he admits, 'takes some explaining', which he does by stressing the 'priority of the local' for the church, whose catholicity does not smother local particularity (as modernity tends to) but is rather defined by it.[283] Parish churches can

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[280] Nicholas Healy, *Church, World and the Christian life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.167.
[281] The case study in the appendix to this thesis has a similar purpose.
[282] 'A Particular Place: The Future of Parish Ministry' in *War and The American Difference* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2011), c.11.
[283] In similar vein, William Cavanaugh refers to globalization as 'false catholicity' in *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism*. (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 2002), p.6.

therefore critique the prevailing social narrative by telling a truer story about the places in which they are set. Whilst acknowledging here the close identification between Anglicanism and territory, Hauerwas to a certain extent overlooks the fact that nations, being another form of locality, are just as particular as parishes.[284] Viewing the Kingdom of Heaven as 'God's International'[285], Hauerwas rarely acknowledges this potential. Because his critical horizon is fixed at The Enlightenment, he risks an unfocused view upon conceptions of nationhood that demand, at least, a more nuanced appreciation of the historic relationship with Christian faith – a theme which will be returned to in the next chapter.

The main target of Hauerwas' opposition, however, is not nations as such, but their perceived captivity of the church, and where to place the boundary between 'church' and 'world' is one of the most salient questions Hauerwas' work raises for parish ministry. In the Anglican setting, 'church', in ministry of word and sacrament, establishes a Christian 'centre' through which the *whole* life of a place is offered to God and, in turn, God's life for that place is received. The tension for any local church, however, is that the Christ in whom this priestly movement is made 'stands at once at the centre and the boundaries of our existence', as Bonhoeffer wrote.[286] Whilst at heart this is a question of Christology, it is also, importantly, one of *holiness*: a key biblical term for unlocking the distinctive social ethic of God's people.

Negotiating the perimeter of holiness, it may be asserted, is about perception as much as practice; vitally, in the teaching of Jesus, it is about 'seeing' oneself as a neighbour. Typically in the Anglican context, the congregational boundary is more feintly drawn than that of the parish, thereby highlighting a specific 'neighbourhood' in which holiness may be practised in relation to others.[287] For St Augustine, love of neighbour acted as a bridge between earthly and heavenly

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[284] Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Is Patriotism a Virtue? The Lindley Lecture for 1984* (University of Kansas, 1984).
[285] Hauerwas, *Community*, p.109.
[286] *Christ the Center* p.61.
[287] In the Biblical narrative, Leviticus 19 envisages love of neighbour and social justice combining in a local setting. On the role of boundaries in this practice, cf. Richard B. Miller in John A.Coleman (ed.) *Christian Political Ethics* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008), pp.68-70.

cities, relating these two realms across their eschatological boundary. Peace between them, he writes, may be 'viewed':

> in every good action it (ie the heavenly city) it performs in relation to God, and in relation to neighbour, since the life of a city is inevitably a social life.[288]

Oliver O'Donovan (2002), whose work often stands in critical relation to that of Hauerwas[289], draws out Augustine's social ethic, focusing on the latter's assertion that community is shaped and defined by its 'common objects of love'.[290] As O'Donovan writes:

> Loving is the corporate function that determines and defines the structures of the political society; it is the key to its coherence and its organisation.[291]

For Augustine, the 'character' of a particular people could be observed by examining whatever it loves – and, conversely, those things it chooses not to love.[292] Significantly, O'Donovan's focus here is upon the love that reaches beyond the community towards external 'goods', rather than the reciprocal love of members for each other. In the Augustinian schema, the two greatest social objects of love are God and neighbour, which together comprise the common life of the church. The social ethic generated in worship must equally, then, be practiced in adventurous love for those who do not 'belong' – a universal command that is only particularised when placed within a 'neighbourhood' of proximate relations that allow for peaceable encounter with those outside prevailing social boundaries.

If, in the Hauerwasian schema, common prayer is the congregational heart of social ethics, its parochial correlate must surely be described as 'common ground' - the field of proximate social relations in which the Christian ethic of love for

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[288] Augustine, *City of God* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972), p.879.
[289] Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches*, pp.174-5; Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Leicester, Apollos, 1994), pp.xv-xvi..
[290] Oliver O'Donovan*, The Common Objects of Love* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2002), p.22ff.
[291] *Ibid.,* p.26.
[292] Augustine, *City of God,* p.890.

neighbour is realised. Because, following Augustine, the common life of the church cannot be formed without such a hinterland, one might fairly conclude, adapting Hauerwas, that the parish is both a social and spatial ethic. As such, the social space – in Bourdieu's terms, the *habitus* - produced by the parish system has a vocational character, being conceived in response to the call of God in Christ. Furthermore, the territoriality of the parish gives concretion – specific gravity, so to speak - to this call and prevents neighbourly relations being subject to mere arbitrary selection.[293]

Parochial space is thus the production of neighbourhood: a virtuous practice especially required of, but not limited to, the priesthood of believers. Anyone and everyone can view themselves as a parishioner and act parochially (that is, in neighbourly love), just as, in Jesus' teaching, anyone can and must view themselves as a neighbour and act accordingly. The parish boundary is, therefore, Christologically as much as locally, defined. For, as Bonhoeffer writes:

> God and the world are thus at one in Christ in a way which means that although the church and the world are different from each other, yet there cannot be a static, spatial borderline between them.[294]

At the heart of the parochial tradition is thus a refusal of what Thomas Arnold, in his defence of the national church, called 'the pretended distinction between spiritual things and secular'.[295] In the second part of this thesis, that calling to 'common ground' will be considered in the light of history and practice.

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[293] A point Timothy Jenkins makes in *An Experiment in Providence* (London, SPCK, 2006) p.24.
[294] *Ethics,* p.207. The accompanying case study explores the church/parish boundary in some detail.
[295] From 'A Fragment on the Church', included in David Nicholls' collection *Church and State in Britain Since 1820* (London, Routledge, 1967), p.34.

Part II *Common Ground*: The Anglican parish in vocation & practice

Chapter 4: The national parish

In the opening chapter, it was proposed that parochial place is formed by a cyclical process through which human agents (socially constituted), first receive and perceive space-time, filter this reality through the traditions conditioning their perception and then act locally according to these traditions. Successive chapters then analysed this model in the light of Christology and contemporary spatial theory, describing the parish as form of spatial praxis in which the ethic of love for neighbour becomes a primary means of demonstrating the reconciliation of earthly place to God in Christ. Thus, the parochial vocation may be expressed as the pursuit of 'common ground' – in the dual sense of space-time's hallowing in relation to God and as the basis for local social relations.

In the second part of the thesis, such theological geography will turn its attention to the distinctive narrative of the Anglican parish, seeking to describe its contours and calling in the English setting. Evidently, such description is both blurred and enhanced by the richness of 'parish' as a word, and the multiplicity of its resonances and meanings. In its rural setting alone, Herron, Jackson and Johnson (2014) identify four such qualitative uses: a feudal or historical settlement; a form of religious or ecclesiastical organisation; a form of secular or civic government and, lastly, a 'community planning process'. Each of these meanings, they write, employs a different 'organising principle'.[296] Each meaning also, however, finds its source in the ecclesiastical parish, embedded from its origins in the broader social landscape. In order to understand this embeddedness – to weigh conceptual understanding against what 'really happened' in the English experience of parish - social history becomes an essential tool, which will be employed as the parochial vocation is now explored in three intersecting dimensions: national, communal and natural.

Even by the simplest appraisal of its call and purpose, the Anglican parish – as the basic, constituent form of the Church of England - is the local expression of a

[296] Rebecca Herron, Jennifer Jackson and & Karen Johnson: *Rural Parishes and Community Organisation* in Bosworth & Somerville (eds.), *Interpreting Rurality* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2014) c.5.

national idea. Yet it is continually surprising how little analysis exists of this '*of England'* definition. Whereas the term 'state', as David Storey (2001) has explained, refers to the legal and political description of shared territory, 'nation' is employed here because of what Storey calls its more 'nebulous' associations, being:

> A collection of people bound together by some sense of solidarity, common culture and shared history.[297]

As such, he continues, a nation is a 'mental construct as much as a physical reality', echoing Benedict Anderson's assertion that nations arise from shared perceptions of common life and a 'deep horizontal comradeship'.[298] The symbolic roots of nationhood are essential, then, to understanding its purpose, or vocation. Anderson, arguing from a Marxist perspective, insists that contemporary ideas of nationhood recognise the 'large cultural systems' that preceded and shaped them, of which he identifies two: the 'dynastic realm' and 'the religious community'.[299] Whilst Anderson draws out the importance of (among other religious communities) 'Christendom' for the emergence of the modern nation state, other commentators go further in emphasizing the explicitly Christian origins of nationhood. Uniquely among the religions, Julia Stapleton (2009) writes:

> Christianity accommodated the local and particular within the universal ... by the doctrine of incarnation through the sanctity of place.[300]

Gathering the nation in

Against the prevailing socialist account of nationhood advanced by Hobsbawm and others in the latter twentieth century, which viewed the nation state essentially as a modern construct, Adrian Hastings (1997) has argued for a much

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[297] David Storey, *Territory: The Claiming of Space* (Harlow, Pearson, 2001), p.71.
[298] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* p.7.
[299] *Ibid.,* p.12.
[300] Julia Stapleton: *Christianity, Patriotism and Nationhood* (Lexington, Maryland, 2009) p.217.

earlier genesis for the nation, of which England was the prototype, by virtue of its particular blend of sacred and secular organisation. While not disputing the acceleration of national consciousness across Europe and America in the Modern era, Hastings proceeds to demonstrate how in England this grew from an explicitly Biblical narrative, without which the concept of nationhood *per se* simply would not exist.[301] In this process, the creation of a national church under Henry VIII and Elizabeth I may be viewed as giving particular political shape to an already long-established self-perception. There are echoes here of a well-rehearsed narrative of European history, which sees the Christian church as, in John Macmurray's phrase, 'the motive force behind the development of (Western) civilization'.[302] For the English context, however, the key issue is that, as Patrick Wormald (1992) presses: 'England was united ecclesiastically well before it was united politically'.[303] This point is made in reference to Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, a pivotal document for such an assertion. According to Wormald, England's 'unparalleled' early sense of national identity was a direct consequence of Bede's integrated vision. His conclusion is unequivocal:

> It was Bede who gave 'Englishness' a manifesto of unique grace and power.[304]

This is clearly a focal insight for the origins of 'national' Christianity. Yet rarely do scholars develop this further to demonstrate its essential link to specifically *local* church organisation.[305] The first great synod of the English church, the Council of Hertford of 672, convened by Archbishop Theodore of Tarsus, is significant here in two ways: firstly, as Godfrey (1962) asserts, because it marked:

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[301] Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge, CUP, 1997) p.4.
[302] John Macmurray, *The Clue to History*, ix. More recently, Tom Holland has argued for a Christian basis to Liberal secularism in 'Uncomfortable Origins', *The New Statesman*, 20/11/2008.
[303] Patrick Wormald, 'The Venerable Bede and the 'Church of the English'' in Geoffrey Rowell (ed.), *The English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism* (Wantage, IKON, 1992), p.21. A view echoed and endorsed by Hastings in *Nationhood,* p.36.
[304] Wormald, *Church of the English*, p.21. He notes that this 'exceptionally creative' integration of nationality and Christianity was to have a 'long future'. *Ibid.,* p.27.
[305] Whilst Hastings does not address the parish, he does highlight significance of the shire in England's national formation: *Nationhood*, p.40.

> the first occasion on which representatives of the English met together for common discussion and decision ...The Anglo-Saxons would continue for a considerable period to be organised politically in separate kingdoms, but their church was now legislating as one body ... *and the way towards national unification had been shown* .[306]

Secondly, the meeting at Hertford laid the foundations for local forms in which this national unity was to be administered, establishing rules for the bishops' jurisdiction within their own *parochia.*[307] The vital counterpart to England's national formation was thus the development of a cohesive system of local communities, from whose varying Anglo-Saxon forms the parish gradually emerged as the principal. However accurately or otherwise it was based in fact, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* was, as is widely recognised, instrumental in fixing the new national Christian narrative and, in particular, the particular blend of sacred and secular that thereafter defined Anglicanism. Historians have struggled with categorizing Bede's *History*, tending to view it either as 'church' history or 'national' history. However, as J.N.Stephens (1977) notes, it proved a seminal – and unprecedented - document because, in a sense, it was neither of these:

> Bede's History does not concern the English 'Church', but the *gens anglorum*. Nor is it an ecclesiastical history, if we understand thereby that it concerns only one part of the *gens* – its ecclesiastical part. It is a history of that life itself...interpreted from a particular conception of God.[308]

The narrative synthesis Bede achieved was further fused by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which Keynes and Lapidge (1983) describe as:

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[306] C.J.Godfrey, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, CUP, 1962) p.133 (my italics). Similarly, Sherley-Price in his introduction to Bede's *History*: 'a common belief in Christ gradually drew together the peoples of Britain into the English nation'. *A History of the English Church and People*, trans., Leo Sherley-Price (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1955), p.23.
[307] H.Bettenson (ed.), *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford, OUP, 1956) p.215. translates *parochia* here as 'diocese', as parochial at this stage denoted the wider sphere of the bishop. D.H. Farmer avers that the Synod of Whitby unified Celtic and Roman forms of organisation by 'the consolidation of local centres of diverse origin into a united nationwide church, under territorial bishops'. In *The Age of Bede* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1983), p.15.
[308] J.N.Stephens *History*, 62:204 (1977), p.12. Cf also Benedicta Ward, *The Venerable Bede* (London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1998) pp.113-4.

> a history of the English as a whole, showing how they shared a common era, stretching back to the beginning of the Christian era.[309]

When the English kingdoms became unified under King Alfred, not only were his foundations for English common law prefaced with excerpts from the Mosaic Law – 'modified for application to Christian nations'[310] – but also his extension of civil society relied upon the 'parochial' bishops – as seen, for example, in their dissemination to local, secular leaders of Alfred's own translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care.*[311]

Just as the adoption and promotion of the Christian narrative in Anglo-Saxon society was playing a central role in the unification and formation of England, it simultaneously began to transform the way in which *local* English society was perceived and governed. As noted in the Introduction, any attempt to trace the origins of the parochial system is fraught with challenges, not least because of the interchangeable forms of nomenclature given to different types of medieval community[312] and the variable way in which key documents are translated. Nevertheless, the slow emergence of a parochial 'system' from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries carried with it the same integration of sacred and secular life that defined the nation. In part this was due to its inheriting and adapting patterns of land ownership from the pagan era which preceded it, whereby, it has been suggested[313], a new parish would effectively be the estate of the converted chieftain and the payment of tithes continued (albeit in somewhat altered form) the tribute from the glebe - 'a legacy from the heathen days' according to Hartridge.[314] Certainly the 'ownership' of the ecclesiastical parish by the local

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[309] *Alfred The Great*, trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1983), p.40.
[310] *Ibid.,* p.39.
[311] *Ibid.,*p29ff. Colls notes how Alfred's laws were 'encrusted with Christian references' in *Identity of England* (Oxford, OUP, 2002), p.18.
[312] Principally township and 'vill'. For a clear summary of these and their relation to the parish, c.f. Angus Winchester, *Discovering Parish Boundaries* (Princes Risborough, Shire, 2000) c.1. Throughout this discussion, it is important to remember that, as it were, 'other forms of locality are available'.
[313] For example, in E.A.Greening Lamborn, *The Parish Church* (Oxford, OUP, 1929), p.68. Cf. also Godfrey, *The English Parish,* c.2.
[314] R.A.R.Hartridge *A History of Vicarages in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, CUP, 1930) p.3: 'Glebe was a legacy from the heathen days'.

landowner was a dominant feature until what has been described as the 'Magna Carta of the parish priest'[315], the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which freed the appointment of parish priests from control of the landowner and placed their oversight more firmly in the hands of the diocesan bishop.[316]

The growth of a parochial system in the Middle Ages had, it may be argued, a cohesive effect upon the emerging bond between national and local identity[317], even if, as Greenfeld (1992) explains, the terminology of 'nation' and 'country' would not appear in dictionaries until the sixteenth century.[318] Asserting that, by the mid-fourteenth century, 'all the requirements' were in place for an English national self-perception, Colls (2002) describes how '9,000 parishes *gathered the nation in*'[319], presenting the parish as a form of social fabric, clothing a newly self-conscious nation.

Thus, it may be seen that, as Angus Winchester (2000) concludes, from the early medieval period, 'the landscape of local administration was both ecclesiastical and civil'.[320] But this unity was not only a consequence of land tenure but also derived from a medieval cosmology that, as has been well-documented, did not delineate between sacred and secular, or 'church' and 'state' in the manner that emerged after the Reformation.[321] As C.S.Lewis (1964) put it in *The Discarded Image*, his invaluable description of the medieval worldview:

> The old language continually suggests a sort of continuity between merely physical events and our most spiritual aspirations.[322]

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[315] *Ibid.,* p.21. C.f. Godfrey, *Anglo-Saxon Church*, p.319ff., for analysis of medieval ownership of parishes.
[316] Notwithstanding the patronage system, which, in many places, remains as an ancient link to 'secular' territory.
[317] Among which Colls highlights a distinctive sense of territory; an English Church, a sense of the 'state' and its laws, a common language and shared 'national fables'. Colls, *Identity*, pp.17-18.
[318] Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Harvard, HUP, 1992), p.31.
[319] Colls, *Identity*, p18 (my italics).
[320] Winchester, *Parish Boundaries*, p.5.
[321] Oliver O'Donovan finds that 'church' and 'state' did not emerge as separate entities until the late seventeenth century. *On the Thirty-Nine Articles* (Exeter, Paternoster Press, 1986), p.94.
[322] C.S.Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge, CUP, 1964) p.94.

A curious compound

Perhaps it is surprising, then, that the English Reformation – 'the biggest single transformation in the history of the English parish', according to Beat Kumin[323] - rather than drawing apart these strands, endowed them with greater strength. Powicke (1941) put the matter well, in expressing how the new national church:

> seemed to acquire new energy from a living principle which could not be defined either as ecclesiastical or secular, but was a curious compound... [324]

Just as it had in the age of Bede, the English Church played a formative role in the emergence of the nation state during this period: legitimising the break with Rome whilst simultaneously baptising the concept of an independent 'Christian nation'.[325] The equation of English Christianity with nascent nationalism grew steadily throughout the sixteenth century, Greenfeld argues, flourishing in the lyrical patriotism of Elizabeth's reign, epitomised by Shakespeare's 'This England' soliloquy[326] and tellingly revealed in the King James Bible's emphatic preference for 'nation' as the 'translation of choice' for numerous regional terms in the vulgate. 'It was', she concludes, 'England's religious standing which was the basis of the nation's distinctiveness and uniqueness'.[327]

As with its origins in the Dark Ages, however, historians rarely explore the role of the parish in sealing and sustaining this 'curious compound' of national

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[323] Beat Kumin, *The Communal Age in Western Europe, c1100-1800* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.47.
[324] Maurice Powicke, *The Reformation in England* (Oxford, OUP, 1941), p.135. Oliver O'Donovan finds that 'church' and 'state' did not emerge as separate entities until the late seventeenth century. *On the Thirty-Nine Articles* (Exeter, Paternoster Press, 1986), p.94.
[325] Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, c.1. Keith Wrightson notes the significance of the Reformation for state-formation – and its effects on parochial community in his essay 'The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England' in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (eds.) *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London, Macmillan, 1996), c.1.
[326] *Ibid.,* p60ff. Greenfeld notes how the King James Bible promoted this equation, with 454 uses of the word 'nation' as opposed to only 100 of 'natio' in the vulgate. The high (or low) point of Elizabethan exceptionalism was undoubtedly Bishop Aylmer's blank assertion that 'God is English'. Cf. Donald Horne, *God is an Englishman* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969), p.264. Horne questions whether this is more than 'a special form of vanity'. Cf. also, Cole Moreton*, Is God Still an Englishman?* (London, Abacus, 2010), p.17.
[327] Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, p.62.

ecclesiology.[328] For at the heart of both the Henrician reformation and the Elizabethan Settlement, which together framed the national church, was a simultaneous strengthening of parish as the essential local component of what was often referred to as the 'English Commonwealth' - the resonant early modern term whose meaning lay somewhere between 'welfare' and 'society'. The first Poor Law, passed in 1536 as part of the sweep of reforms pioneered by Thomas Cromwell following the 1534 Act of Supremacy, established this local principle, later expanded in the Elizabethan Acts of 1598 and 1601, which, in Elton's (1955) words, 'borrowed the parish from the old ecclesiastical organisation of charity', thus setting in place a local welfare system that lasted for the next two and a half centuries.[329] The social cost of an emerging national polity was, in part at least, underwritten by the parish.

In a perceptive historical study Joan Kent (1995) argues that, in contrast to the prevailing view of the 'powerless' authority of the state in the localities in early modern England, the parish proved to be the essential local counterpart to state-formation in the period 1640-1740. Citing, among other factors, the local establishment of workhouses following an Act of Parliament in 1723 and the growing strength of the vestry meeting as a representative and effective form of parochial administration, Kent concludes that:

> To understand the growing power of the English in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century England, it is thus necessary to appreciate not just the role of county elites or the state's new bureaucrats, but also to take into account the often willing compliance of parish vestries and their officers.[330]

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[328] Keith Wrightson, for example, concludes that Early Modern England saw an 'intensified interaction between the locality and the larger society', but only implies the pivotal role of the parish as the fulcrum of this dual identity. Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (London, Routledge, 1982), p.223ff; also his essay, 'The Politics of the Parish' in *The Experience of Authority*, p.31.

[329] A.G.Dickens remarks of Elizabeth I that 'her religion was deeply permeated by a secular idealism'. In *The English Reformation,* (London, Fontana, 1964) p.403.

[330] Joan R. Kent, 'State Formation and Parish Government', in *The Historical Journal* 38:2 (1995), p.403. K.J.Kesselring describes a similar congruence between local and national in ''Berwick is our England'': Local and National identities in an Elizabethan Border Town', in Norman L.Jones & Daniel Woolf, *Local Identities in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

As Tate (1969) and Fletcher (2003) have argued, the parish also provided a degree of political participation denied for the majority of the populace at the national level. Fletcher explains this with regard to parochial boundaries:

> Although parish life, and English society more generally, was far from democratic, parish boundary marking provided an opportunity for widespread involvement of the 'lesser sort'.[331]

Not only did the Poor Law effectively localise the emergence of the nation state, but it arguably also *nationalised* the local – as evinced by the Report of the Poor Law commissioners in 1834, who, tellingly, considered each parish to be 'in respect of parochial management, *an independent nation*'.[332] By the nineteenth century, however, there is the distinct sense that too much was being asked of – and claimed for - the parish in this respect. The high tide of Victorian secular parochialism is marked by Toulmin Smith's magisterial work from 1857, *The Parish*: in essence a handbook detailing its powers in law, but with an extensive, polemical introduction in which Smith argues that, despite being the form 'on which the chief part of the social and public relations of every neighbourhood ...depends', the parish 'is not ecclesiastical either in origin or purpose'.[333] Ecclesiastical powers were a later accretion, he emphasises (citing Laud's Canons of 1640 in particular[334]) - and, in making his point, gives an often-erudite summary of the parish's early medieval origins in secular land use and local government, while at the same time studiously avoiding its evident integration with religious life. With its resistance to the infusion of the ecclesiastical with the political, *The Parish* appears as a distinctly modern work, in which the seismic movements of European society through Reformation and Enlightenment loom large in the background.

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[331] David Fletcher, *Parish Boundary,* p.192. W.E.Tate notes the somewhat exaggerated description from 1708 of the parish as 'the cradle of our liberties', in *The Parish Chest* (Cambridge, CUP, 1969), p.9.

[332] Quoted by David Fletcher in The Parish Boundary: A Social Phenomenon in Hanoverian England, *Rural History* 14:2 (2003), p.179 (my italics). Steve Hindle, in similar tone, remarks that the parish in this period became a kind of 'welfare republic', in Shepard & Withington (eds.) *Communities in Early Modern England*, p.98ff.

[333] Joshua Toulmin Smith, *The Parish* (London, H.Sweet, 1857), p.4.

[334] *Ibid.,*p.33: 'It was the object of Archbishop Laud to make the clergy instruments of political rule through all the parishes of England'.

In a fascinating study, William Cavanaugh (2002) considers this context in relation to the church, arguing for the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries being viewed as the 'birthpangs' of the secular state, which first 'absorbed' the church before eliminating it from the public sphere. Cavanaugh considers how the creation of 'religion' as a concept was itself a means of circumscribing - and thereby controlling – church power.[335] Indeed, power is a key dynamic here, as in any consideration of territory, which Storey (2001) defines as 'the spatial expression of power'.[336] The assertion that, as Storey continues, territory is a portion of bounded geographic space 'over which claims are made' articulates one of the most compelling insights of human geography in the past thirty years.[337] With the matter at hand, it is essential to recognise that the 'claims' made over parochial and national space are grounded in its Establishment in law, the source of its secular power.[338] That such a political hybrid survives into the present time may be remarkable, given the much-discussed 'death' of Christian Britain since 1945[339], but its resilience – and fate - is inextricably bound together with the parochial ideal, which has crested every wave of debate about disestablishment since the nineteenth century.[340]

It is hard to overstate the centrality of the parish in this discourse – both practically and symbolically. Wesley Carr helpfully distinguishes between between 'high' and 'low' Establishment[341], the former being affairs of symbolic national ceremonial (the monarch as Defender of The Faith, for example) and the latter focusing on Anglicanism's inherited sense of local responsibility, legally enshrined in the 'cure of souls' given to each parish incumbent. This provides,

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[335] William Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination,* p.22.
[336] Storey, *Territory*, p6
[337] C.f Robert Sack, *Territoriality*; Massey *For Space*.
[338] In an intriguing phrase, Bagehot describes 'local holiness' as the consequence of the monarchy's fusion of religious and worldly power. *The English Constitution* (Oxford, OUP, 1928), p.35.
[339] C.f. Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London, Routledge, 2001), c.1.
[340] C.f. David Nicholls, *Church and State in Britain Since 1820* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), c.1. Also usefully surveyed in E.R.Norman, *Church and Society in England 1770-1970* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976), c.3.
[341] In 'A Developing Establishment', *Theology* 102:805 (1999), pp.2-10. Cf. David McLean in 'The Changing Framework of Establishment', *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 34:7 (2004), pp.292-304.

Inge (2004) has argued, not only an 'earthed' establishment but continues to ensure the 'protection' of the parish principle at the national level.[342]

Germ of civilisation

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, given its pertinence in local welfare, the most fervent apologies for the parish as 'Christian England' in microcosm appear in the first half of the nineteenth century, a period of fierce disestablishmentarianism. In this climate, the Poet Laureate, Robert Southey, writing in 1820 about the expansion of the new cities, argues for an extension of the 'old parochial system' into urban areas and describes 'every parish being in itself a little commonwealth' [343] - a fascinating, if nostalgic, encapsulation of the term, suggesting, by extension, a reciprocal impression of the nation as, in effect, a 'large parish'. The spectre of urbanisation filters through this narrative for, as Henry William Wilberforce presses in his impassioned pamphlet from 1838, *The Parochial System: An Appeal to English Churchmen,* the idea of the self-contained parish had become, by the early nineteenth century, 'little more than a delusion' in large cities - Wilberforce noting how that of Bethnal Green, for example, now contained over 62,000 souls.[344] Arguing that the parish is 'part and parcel of the ancient laws of this land', he calls for an urgent reconfiguration and subdivision of parochial boundaries, asking:

> Why was the ancient custom discontinued (a custom coeval with the parish and almost a necessary part of it) so that our old parishes were not subdivided as occasion required?[345]

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[342] Inge, 'Theological Reflections on the Place of the Sacred in Society', *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 7:35 (2004), pp.397-8.
[343] Robert Southey, from B.I.Coleman (ed.) *The Idea of the City in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p.41.
[344] Henry William Wilberforce: *The Parochial System: An Appeal to English Churchmen* (Memphis, General, 2012). p.3. Recent historical studies show this had long been the case in the London suburbs. For example, Boulton notes how parochial administration had been slow to respond to urban expansion: parishes in Southwark and the East End, for example, were on an 'unwieldy scale' even by the seventeenth century. Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, CUP, 2005), p.263.
[345] *Ibid*., p.6.

Such appeals for the reappraisal of the parish (then, as now) invariably begin by sketching an imagined parochial ideal, observe how far this has fallen, then employ nostalgic concepts of common life and welfare to inspire present action. Coleridge's abstruse, though influential, defence of the Established church *On The Constitution of Church and State* (1829), epitomises this approach and is particularly interesting for its lyrical evocation of the parish's place within the nation:

> That to every parish throughout the kingdom there is transplanted a germ of civilisation: that … there is a nucleus around which the capabilities of the place may crystallise and brighten … This it is which the patriot and philanthropist…cannot estimate at too high a price.[346]

Whilst idealistic to the point of fiction, Coleridge's 'germ of civilization' comes close to describing the imagined microcosm of national welfare, to which legislators and social commentators alike make endless returns, up to the present day.[347] Leaving aside the question as to whether Coleridge fully appreciated the harsh reality of parish life, this, his last published work, shows an instinctive appreciation that the parish expressed, as no other concept, the bond between the national and local 'soul' and, presciently, that this must needs be reimagined in secular terms for an era in which uniformity in religion was already a thing of the past. His concept of the 'clerisy' – a sketched proposal for a broadened leadership in the national church, to include 'the learned of all denominations'[348] - was a tentative, undeveloped step towards this acknowledgement, anticipating later, more confident strides towards 'secular' Christian society.[349]

The Church of England's peculiar national status is, then, an indispensable key to unlocking its enduring local role. In a significant work, Frank Prochaska (2006) has argued forcefully for viewing Christianity as the very engine of social action

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[346] S.T. Coleridge, *On the Constitution of Church and State* (London, J.M.Dent, 1972), p.60.
[347] Cf. 'In Praise of…Civil Parishes', editorial in *The Guardian*, 16th May 2011.
[348] Coleridge, *Church and State*, p36ff.
[349] Most notably, Temple's *Christianity and Social Order*, considered below.

in Britain until its localised systems of charity and welfare were, in his view, surrendered to the agencies of an increasingly centralised state, to which the Church gave willing deference.[350] Addressing the remarkable upsurge in Christian charitable enterprise during the Victorian era, Prochaska's concern is the way in which Christian voluntarism then receded in direct proportion to the advance of state provision during the first half of the twentieth century. He observes that:

> While central government was little noticed in the 1850s, the tendrils of the state were everywhere to be seen a century later, from the local surgery to the unemployment office on the high street.[351]

The simultaneous contraction of 'Christian society' and expansion of the Welfare State was, he argues, far from coincidental. Indeed, as he writes:

> The expansion of government into education and the social services was both cause and effect of Christian decline.[352]

When seeking to trace the decay of specifically *Anglican* social action, however, Prochaska's account is somewhat perplexing – the main issue being that it becomes lost in his necessarily broad, interdenominational sweep of 'Christian social service'. This would be reasonable if his conclusions regarding its decline were not so firmly fixed on the Church of England. Whilst thorough in his analysis of the causes for decline - he cites, in particular, the devastating effect of the two World Wars and the rise of a less voluntary attitude to social service through agencies like the Charity Organisation Society - the culmination of his case rests upon an exhausted Anglican church, which effectively 'sold out' to the state in the years immediately prior to and following the end of the Second World War.

In particular, he highlights as significant the resolutions made at the Lambeth Conference of 1948, the pivotal year that saw, in Derek Fraser's words, 'the whole

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[350] Frank Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain* (Oxford, OUP, 2006), c.1.
[351] *Ibid.,* p.148.
[352] *Ibid.,* p.150.

apparatus of what came to be called the Welfare State move into operation'.[353] Homing in on this conference's resolution that the state was 'intended (by God) to be an instrument of human welfare', he concludes:

> Obeisance to the 'omnicompetent' state was an abdication of a historic responsibility, and it reflected a social and cultural transformation … as great as any since the eighteenth-century religious revival.[354]

A close reading of the 1948 Lambeth report, however, shows its conclusions to be far more nuanced than Prochaska would admit. Though acknowledging the process of extending state control as 'inevitable' and 'not likely to be reversed', the conference recognises the 'delicate problem' this presents for the Church.[355] Emphasising the latter's need 'to be vigilant to warn the state against treating persons as means to ends', the report resolves, crucially, that:

> The Church must not allow the State to disregard or throw away the experience and the good will which are found in voluntary social service … Some forms of welfare and educational work are better done under voluntary auspices than by state agencies, provided they are efficiently done, and especially by the Church within the fellowship of the Body of Christ.[356]

This is certainly not the language of 'abdication'. What, then, does such ambivalence towards the state represent? The Church of England, Keith Robbins (1983) observed, 'occupied a puzzling position' between 1918 and 1939, which led it 'deep into the thickets of social policy'.[357] This uncertain role – which partially mirrors the hybrid blend of voluntarism and state provision in social service during the same period[358] - reflected its growing autonomy from national government, a process which had culminated in the Enabling Act of 1919 and the

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[353] Fraser, *Welfare State*, p.261. Fraser gives a comprehensive overview of the 1944-48 legislation in chapter 9.
[354] Prochaska, *Christianity & Social Service,* p.151.
[355] *Lambeth Conference 1948: Encyclical Letter from the Bishops together with the Resolutions* (London, SPCK, 1948), p.17.
[356] *Ibid*. p.18.
[357] Keith Robbins: *The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain 1870-1975* (London, Longman, 1975) p.156.
[358] Cf. Fraser, *Welfare State*, p.52.

creation of the Church's own legislative assembly. The figure of William Temple was pre-eminent in negotiating this new role, both in securing, as leader of the 'Life and Liberty' movement from 1917, the partial separation from government and later, as Bishop of Manchester then Archbishop - first of York, then Canterbury - in coming to terms with its implications for the 'national mission' of the Anglican church and its relationship to the emergent state.[359] Temple's thought - hammered out in his numerous publications and the seemingly endless succession of national conferences which typified Church of England debate in the interwar years[360] - may thus be seen as the late flowering of an idealistic Anglicanism that sought a re-identification of church and state: viewing the latter as, in Stephen Spencer's words, 'an extensive and powerful social structure that would bring its citizens to their true end'.[361]

Temple's bestselling *Christianity and Social Order*, published in 1942, is the mature summary of this position, in which his 'derivative social principles' of Freedom, Social Fellowship and Service are commended for realising 'the fullest possible development of individual personality in the widest and deepest possible fellowship'.[362] Though a detailed assessment of his social thought is not desirable here, Temple's writings and ministry epitomise the paradoxical forces that underlay Anglican social service in the first half of the last century. These may be summarised in terms of a threefold tension: between the desire for both self-governance *and* union with the state; between collectivist socialism and a deeply paternalistic Anglicanism (a contradiction which Temple personified[363]) and, lastly, that between an increasingly state-based agenda and the desire to preserve what remained of 'voluntary society'.

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[359] For Temple's formative role in Anglican life during this period, cf. John Kent, *William Temple: Church, State and Society in Britain, 1880-1950* (Cambridge, CUP, 1992), c.1; also F.A.Iremonger, *William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury: his life & letters* (Oxford, OUP, 1948).
[360] Cf. John Kent, *William Temple*, chapters 2&3 for analysis of these.
[361] Stephen Spencer, William Temple's Christianity and Social Order: after Fifty Years, *Theology* 95:32 (1992), p.34.
[362] William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1942), p.74.
[363] A tension captured in his wartime correspondence concerning the Beveridge Report. Cf. F.S.Temple (ed.) *William Temple: Some Lambeth Letters* (Oxford, OUP, 1963), pp.91-95.

The net result was not a withdrawal from local social service: rather a concerted attempt, under Temple, to baptise in infancy the state provision over whose growth it had decreasing control. This could not help but involve an eclipse of the local in favour of the national, which now presents the years between 1918 and 1948 as something of a 'lost period' for the Anglican parish. For Keith Snell (2006), this period marked a profound shift in the idea of 'settlement' at the heart both of the parish system (as will be considered in the next chapter) and English life as whole. He writes:

> Developing from and using the Anglican parish, the settlement system delivered and nestled a Christian welfare system that was benevolent and encompassing when seen in international terms, one whose *mini-statehoods* laid expectations and groundwork for the broader welfare state of the twentieth century.[364]

The move after 1948 to an idea of, in effect, 'national settlement', whilst profoundly beneficial in many ways, arguably denuded the local attachment that preceded it, leaving the ecclesiastical parish, shorn of all secular powers but its enduring mandate for the 'cure of souls' as a vestigial token.

Conclusion: Little England?

The Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh, in his 1967 essay *The Parish and the Universe*, makes the provocative claim that:

> All great civilisations are based on parochialism – Greek, Israelite, English.[365]

Continuing, 'it requires a great deal of courage to be parochial', Kavanagh's point is that parochialism involves recognition of and pride in, the authenticity of local experience, which requires no constant comparison with, or recourse to neighbouring forms of expression. As such, he writes:

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[364] K.D.M.Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, pp.160-61 (my italics).
[365] Included in *A Poet's Country*, *Selected Prose* (Dublin, Liliput, 2003), p.237.

> Parochialism and provincialism are [direct] opposites. The provincial has no mind of his own; he does not trust what his eyes see until he has heard what the metropolis – towards which his eyes are turned – has to say on any subject ... The parochial mentality, on the other hand is never in any doubt about the social and artistic validity of his parish.[366]

Whilst he is writing primarily about creative expression, Kavanagh's conclusion that 'parochialism is universal: it deals with fundamentals' is a valuable insight into the shifting nature of English national identity, whose catholicity or 'universal' definition has, it is being argued, directly derived from a sense of local self-possession. The unavoidable problem for the Church of England, though, is that the seeds of its legitimacy are set in the historic core of political power: the resulting sense of 'entitlement' make the parish in its Anglican form deeply ambivalent for many and noxious to some.[367] In the current situation, the account of England as a 'Christian Nation', as one narrative among many, remains highly contested - not least because, to borrow Massey's phrase about space in general, 'its symbolism is endlessly mobilized in political argument'.[368] Similarly, in the topical question of whether England is a nation at all, such descriptions tend to be heavily freighted by those intending to re-create a sense of 'Englishness' in the wake of a resurgent nationalism in other parts of the British Isles. Given this weighting, terms such as 'parish' inevitably list towards the past rather than the future, frustrating a balanced view in the present of their value and validity. Therefore, it is vital to recognise that the national vocation of the Anglican parish

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1967), Cf. Julia Stapleton: 'nations that endure are those that build upwards from smaller associations'. In 'The voice of Chesterton in the conversation of England', *The Chesterton Review* XXXV: 3&4, pp.622-23.

[366] Kavanagh, *Parish*, p.237.

[367] Cole Moreton records the view of one parish priest: 'the whole parish system is underpinned by the assumption that we have a right to be there. That approach has been a huge failure'. In *Is God Still an Englishman*? p.328.

[368] *Ibid.*, p5. The most recent occasion being a flurry of articles in April 2014, following the Prime Minister's assertion that Britain is a 'Christian country'. For example, 'Yes, Britain is a Christian country' by Toby Young, in *The Spectator*, April 26th 2014. http://www.spectator.co.uk/life/status-anxiety/9191021/toby-young-yes-britain-is-a-christian-country/. Accessed 15/6/2015. Jonathan Chaplin (2009) has observed how, in contemporary debates, the term 'Christian nation' is often employed polemically by those (both Catholic and Reformed) seeking a restoration of the 'essentially Christian corporate character' of national life. In 'Can Nations be 'Christian'? *Theology* CXII:870 (2009), p.420.

is not something that can or need be 'restored' - a view stemming from the mistaken understanding of space as a static commodity rather than a dynamic, enacted process - for it has never been fixed, but rather constantly reconceived and reproduced.

It is a commonplace that evocations of Christian society are returned to in times of crisis or national instability, but the fact that they are extremely ancient does not mean they are incapable of renewal. Beside the ecclesiological emphasis on the need to 'proclaim afresh' the Christian vision for society lays the vital geographical insight that ideas of 'national' and 'local' are always in flux, being formed and re-formed according to the dynamics of culture, power and social relationship.

With characteristic plainness, Bishop Hensley Henson, writing a century ago, stated that 'a national church in the old sense... is definitely and irretrievably obsolete'.[369] 'The 'old sense' he was referring to was that which assumed the nominal Anglicanism of every person in the country: a myth, which, if ever true was only strictly the case between 1559 and the Act of Toleration in 1689. In particular, Henson singles out the 1919 Enabling Act, which, in his view, wrought:

> a revolutionary change in the parochial system ... (because) the territorial basis of church membership, which is the necessary assumption of a national church, was abandoned.[370]

This assumption, had long been an illusion, however, as the 1851 Census had dramatically revealed. Writing of the plurality of place and religious practice that now had to be reckoned with, Darby (1973) observed that, by 1851, 'the parish was not even the sole territorial unit of *religious* life'.[371] Successive systematic crises reveal the parish to be surprisingly adaptive, demonstrating how the

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[369] Herbert Hensley Henson, *The Church of England* (Cambridge, CUP, 1939), p.175.
[370] *Ibid.,* p.169.
[371] H.C.Darby (ed.) *A New Historical Geography of England* (Cambridge, CUP, 1973), p.533 (my italics).

territorial basis of the Church may be redefined without being abandoned.[372] To take one articulation of this, Rowan Williams (2005) has written that, by asserting the public and political nature of religious affiliation, the 'vestiges of a confessional polity' retained by the state place the Church of England in a unique position to form local society in ways that provide far more than 'a cheap pool of labour for projects of social integration'.[373] Indeed, as the surviving embodiment of 'local settlement', the parish (both civil and ecclesiastical) remains the carrier of an idea as old as England itself, an idea that, Kavanagh suggests, can only be perceived at the micro-level:

> It is not by the so-called national dailies that people who emigrate keep in touch with their roots ... So it is for these reasons that I return to the local newspaper. Who has died? Who has sold his farm?[374]

This comes strikingly close to what Ben Quash calls the 'polity of presence' at the heart of the Church of England's national vocation. In his essay of the same name, Quash notes the marked contrast between the presentation of Anglicanism in the national and local newspapers:

> In the local press, the Church's role in community life – providing care, taking responsibility, focusing local activities, and all the rest of it – is described and acknowledged. In this context there is nothing *odd* about the place of the church.[375]

There is, in conclusion, an unavoidable perichoresis to the terms 'nation' and 'parish', which has existed from the earliest foundations of English society. Largely because of this, the parish embodies a similar mutual indwelling of 'religious' and 'secular' that has long endowed English life with a highly localised

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[372] The subject under consideration in Wells & Coakley (eds.) *Praying For England.*
[373] Rowan Williams, 'Convictions, Loyalties and the Secular State', *Political Theology* 6:2 (2005), pp.156, 164. Jeremy Morris has questioned whether it is 'theologically responsible' for the Establishment to depend on 'residual functions'. 'The Future of Church and State' in Duncan Dormor, Jack McDonald & Jeremy Caddick (eds.) *Anglicanism: The Answer to Modernity* (London, Continuum, 2003), p.181.
[374] *Parish,* p.237.
[375] Ben Quash, 'The Anglican Church as a Polity of Presence', in *Anglicanism: The Answer to Modernity,* p.49. This lack of 'oddness', which finds, for example, the parish priest still to be the inevitable first point of journalistic call in situations of local crisis or tragedy, is the key to the parochial calling, is explored by Edmund Newey in Wells & Coakley, *Praying for England,* c.4.

form of civil Christianity: even if, for many, this remains only as a trace element of cultural identity. One cannot sound the word 'parish' without both sacred and secular resonance, which gives unambiguous credence to the 'of England' definition of the national church. Whilst not without significant problems - wistful exceptionalism and reactionary jingoism not least among them - this 'England-ness' of the parish must be reckoned with if the Anglican vocation is to be fully understood. At heart, it expresses a vision for common life which is an integral strand in the complex weave of contemporary English identity: one which, in Stapleton's words:

> defies categorization in simple cultural or civic terms, one that is not lightly dismissed as an inferior or deformed expression of nationhood, or as the thin end of the 'ethnic' nationalist wedge.[376]

If as Krishnan Kumar notes in the same collection of essays, it is more accurate to speak, not of English *nationalism*, but of an English national *tradition*, the parish has not only had the 'hallowing' effect on territory described above, but made 'national' definition inseparable from local description – has made England, as well as the Church, parochial. It is also of great significance in geographical analysis because it defines the church *territorially*, as opposed to congregationally or by a specific form of religious practice, such as Baptist or Pentecostal. The Christological point is vital here: the Church is 'of' and *for* England, because it believes Christ to be so – just as he is held to be 'of' any location, nationally defined or otherwise. Once this theological endorsement of local particularity has been established, the struggle to define who and how one belongs to England can be engaged, resisting the notion either that this is subject to one narrative account or somehow geographically 'fixed'.

If, as is contended, national life has, from the outset, been imbued with a localised form of secular Christianity, the parish system has equally ensured Anglican

[376] In Arthur Aughey & Christine Berberich (eds.), *These Englands* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011), p.234.

ecclesiology has an inescapable secularity to it.[377] Whilst this doubtless contributed towards the separation of Christian social ethics from their source in God - what Erdozain (2009), quoting Clement Attlee, names 'Christianity without the mumbo-jumbo'[378] – and thus the growing secularisation of English society, it has also enabled a form of what Simone Weil (1978) described as:

> that mutual penetration of the religious and the profane which would be the essence of a Christian civilisation.[379]

Given that the English parish is defined by this interpenetration[380], it is curious that such a chasm appears to exist between the study of its historic role in English society and the theological engine, which - albeit compromised and complicated by alliance with secular power – is its motive and momentum. The strain of 'religionless' Christianity in English life (nowadays often dressed in the form of 'Christian values') is well-attested[381], but, more substantially, the unity in Christ of what Bonhoeffer calls 'the two realities' of God and the world - and the intersection of the Lutheran 'two kingdoms' at the heart of his *Ethics*[382] - was also the ethos of the national church and at the heart of Hooker's vision for ecclesiastical polity[383]. This underwrites the curious compound of parochial Christianity with far greater theological potency than the accidents of history might suggest.

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[377] The counterpoint of which is F.D.Maurice's view that both church and nation were, in different senses, 'anti-secular'. *The Kingdom of Christ* (London, SCM, 1958) c.5:III, p.228.
[378] Dominic Erdozain, *Christianity Without the Mumbo-Jumbo: The Making of a Secular Outlook in Modern Britain*, address to KLICE conference, 2009. http://www.klice.co.uk/uploads/Erdozain%20secular%20outlook.pdf, accessed 15/6/2015.
[379] Simone Weil, *The Need For Roots* (London, RKP, 1978), p.285.
[380] Timothy Jenkins argues that, in the country parish, sacred and profane spheres have no clear separation, in *Religion in English Everyday Life* (Oxford, Berghahn, 1999) p.70.
[381] A good summary is given in Erdozain*, Mumbo-Jumbo*.
[382] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p.197.
[383] Hooker describing church and commonwealth as 'personally one societie', in *Laws,* Book 8:1:4. David Edwards affirms Hooker's synthesis of 'two kingdoms' doctrine, in *Christian England* Vol.2 (London, Collins, 1983), pp.100-101. For in-depth analysis, cf. Torrance J.Kirby, *Richard Hooker's Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy* (Leiden, Brill, 1990).

Chapter 5: The parish as neighbourhood

'Historically', write Herron, Jackson and Johnson (2014), 'parishes have often been described as places where people recognised each other'.[384] The Anglican parish, it is argued, is the field of proximate social relations, the 'common ground', in which this mutual recognition takes place: where neighbourhood is both acknowledged and practised. Indeed, given its historic role in shaping local communities, one might go further to say that, in the English context, the parish represents the *archetypal* neighbourhood, to which other local forms inevitably refer. In large part, this may be seen as a consequence of what K.D.M.Snell (2006) calls the 'enormous saliency' of the Anglican parish to systems of welfare in England from 1700 up to 1950.[385] As he remarks:

> I can think of no … community focus that had anything approaching the administrative, legal, social and cultural importance of the parish ... *Community* for most people *was the parish*.[386]

There can be little question that this role extends well back into medieval society and the 'bridging' centuries covered by an increasing range of historical studies that have emerged in the last twenty-five years, which are effecting a quiet transformation of local social history in their rediscovery of the English parish.[387] In the collection *The Parish in English Life, 1400-1600*, Katherine French makes a strikingly similar observation to Snell's assessment of its significance in the Modern era:

> It was the level of most collective social behaviour. Poor relief, religious worship, neighbourhood and village celebrations, the collection of taxes and a myriad of cultural interactions and negotiations were all organised and conducted within

[384] *Interpreting Rurality*, p.75.
[385] Snell, *Parish*, p.499.
[386] *Ibid*. p.499.
[387] French assesses the development of this strand of social history in the introduction to *The Parish in English Life, 1400-1640*.

> this fundamental unit. English society and culture between 1400 and 1600 ... simply cannot be understood without taking the parish into account.[388]

All the more surprising, then, that, as Snell (2006) writes:

> Religious issues and organisation, and civil-welfare administration are topics that are usually separated by largely secularised modern historians.[389]

Certainly the 'invisibility' of the parish church in much twentieth century English social history is an acknowledged phenomenon[390], made conspicuous by its emerging prominence in more contemporary studies. In Derek Fraser's standard text *The Evolution of the British Welfare State* (2003), the ongoing role of the Church in social service beyond the Victorian age barely merits a mention - omitting, for example, any reference to William Temple, in whose writings the phrase 'Welfare State' was coined.[391]

If, as is being asserted, perception is determined by narrative tradition, this 'invisibility' should not occasion surprise; rather, it requires those from other traditions to reveal what, hitherto, may have been overlooked – in this case, the enduring vitality of the parish church as a principal source of local welfare in England. And yet the ecclesiastical parish is an historical enigma, its reception fading out and then in, periodically threatened with redundancy and yet persisting more or less intact into the present day. There are, perhaps, two primary reasons for this: the ebb and flow of its associations with political power and, crucially, the equally shifting tides of historiography in its view of the social significance of the church.

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[388] Katherine French, *Parish in English Life,* p.3.
[389] K.D.M.Snell: *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales 1700-1950* (Cambridge, CUP, 2006) p.15.
[390] Cf. S.J.D.Green: *The Passing of Protestant England* (Cambridge, CUP, 2010), p.6.
[391] Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillian, 2003). Temple coins the term in 'Christianity and The State': for commentary, cf. Matthew Grimley: *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State Between the Wars* (Oxford, Clarendon, 2004, 2004), p.1ff.

To take the latter point first, changes in the social role of the Anglican parish cannot be considered in isolation from broader questions concerning the increasing secularisation of modern British society and the historic decline of all Christian denominations in terms of their membership and influence in wider society. Surveying recent scholarship on this theme, Jeremy Morris (2003) has identified three strands: 'institutional marginalisation', or 'the progressive disentanglement of established religion … from structures of local and national government'[392]; 'institutional attenuation' – a reduction in the church's overall membership - and, thirdly, 'cultural displacement', whereby alternative forms of morality and common life have come to occupy the role formerly filled by the church. As Morris observes, such changes have been 'a work long in the making'[393] and the question of their origin, extent and local variegation remains a focus of intense interdisciplinary debate.

Critical for the historian are the questions of *when* and, to a lesser extent, *where* such decline began to take effect. Jeremy Morris categorises the progress of this debate in terms of a 'modernist' position – which tended to take a pessimistic view of the churches' response to Modernity and a more recent 'revisionist' position, which, over the last forty years, has come to challenge the assumption of rapid church decline from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.[394] For Morris, the high-water mark of revisionism was reached with the publication in 2001 of Callum Brown's *The Death of Christian Britain*, which asserted the vitality and resilience of British Christianity until the 'long 1960s' (1956-73) when the churches experienced rapid and terminal decline. Despite its narrative bias towards urban, nonconformist experience, Brown's thesis is highly significant, as much for its shortcomings as its strengths.[395] Indeed, by simultaneously prolonging the life and hastening the death of British Christianity it provokes an uncertain response from Christian practitioners and church historians alike.[396]

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[392] 'The Strange Death of Christian Britain: Another Look at the Secularization Debate' in *The Historical Journal*, 46, 4 (2003), p.972.
[393] *Ibid*., p.975.
[394] Morris, *Strange Death*, pp.965-6.
[395] For the former, cf. *Problem*, p.8ff.
[396] Discussed in Jane Garnett, Matthew Grimley & Alana Harris (eds.) *Redefining Christian Britain: Post-1945 Perspective* (London, SCM, 2007).

Whenever the date for decline is set, what Brown calls the 'endgame' of British Christianity[397] becomes extremely important, determining whether twentieth century church history is seen principally as a matter of life or death. Complicating any such diagnosis is the plain fact that, as Matthew Grimley (2007) has pointed out in a recent appraisal of Brown's thesis, 'the victim is not actually dead. There is no corpse in the library…'.[398] As the previous chapter contended, the persistence, especially, of a national church - albeit in a denuded state - leaves the question open and frustrates every attempt at autopsy.

The potential historical ground being vast, this chapter will proceed to highlight five stages in the history of the parish which, it is proposed, both demonstrate its enduring vocation to neighbourhood and display how this calling has been 'made flesh' in the English context.

The sacred community: 1215-1500

The establishment of the parish as a national system of localities by the time of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215[399], to some extent marks its 'victory' over other forms of local organisation. During the long period of its establishment, Hartridge, for example, notes:

> (the parish) came to replace the *villa* as a unit, and to prepare for, even create, the village.[400]

Katherine French (2000) explains that this creative role was only strengthened after the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century and what has been seen as a decline of village community during this period. 'After the plague', she writes,

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[397] Brown, *Death*, p.7.
[398] *Redefining Christian Britain,* p.289.
[399] For concurrence regarding this date for establishment of parish 'system', cf. D.M.Palliser, in Susan Wright (ed.), *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion 1350-1750* (London, Hutchinson, 1988), p.9.
[400] Hartridge, *Vicarages,* p.2.

'local life revolved more around the parish'.[401] It is vital to recognise, however, that within a 'national' framework, there was huge regional and local variation in the structure and function of medieval parishes, as French recognises in her study of late medieval parochial life in the Diocese of Bath and Wells:

> Each parish's unique resources, location, status, wealth and needs distinguished it from all others. Such local characteristics and priorities evolved into local religious cultures that became forums for community identity.[402]

Central to French's analysis is the idea of the pre-Reformation parish as a form of sacred community, in which the role of church – especially episcopal - governance was particularly evident. Successive episcopal reforms in pastoral oversight in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries concerning revenue collection, and more consistent patterns of local organisation - especially through the church courts - meant that, French argues:

> Over the course of the late middle ages, English parishes grew in self-confidence and influence.[403]

This influence, she attests, not only concerned the *coercive* ways in which church life penetrated medieval society (attendances at mass, tithe gatherings and so on), but, importantly, the voluntary dimensions of parochial life, such as parish 'guilds', church ales and the local celebration of saints' days[404] - a recognisable mix of 'conviviality and charity', in Judith Bennett's words.[405] The ongoing need for local fundraising bridged both: it was coercive – in that growing legislation in the thirteenth century required parishes to take on extensive responsibilities for the financial upkeep of the church building and grounds – and voluntary, in that (then, as now) these demands became the occasion for wide-ranging local

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[401] Katherine French, *The People of The Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval Diocese* (Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p43.
[402] *Ibid.,* p.21.
[403] *Ibid.,* p.27.
[404] *Ibid.,* p.22.
[405] Bennett considers the role of 'parish ales' in this respect in 'Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England', *Past and Present* 154:1 (1997).

expressions of communal life, as French has demonstrated in her detailed studies of parochial fundraising in late medieval Somerset.[406]

In this context, the parish guild is particularly instructive, Rosser (1988) has argued, as a means by which the parish system accommodated more dynamic forms of social space that exceeded its territorial boundary. The guilds, inaugurated via papal licence - often in response to the aforementioned demands of local fundraising - proliferated across late medieval Europe, before their demise by statute in 1547, along with much of the apparatus of the 'religious' parish. Because of the 'virtual cessation' of creating new parishes after 1300 (such that they remained largely unchanged for some six hundred years[407]), Rosser argues that the guild, as form of voluntary association, could respond to wider networks of relationship (in commerce, for example) in response to 'a common impetus ... to transcend the limitations, geographical or institutional, of the parish', especially, he notes, 'in social contexts characterised by a relatively high degree of mobility, such as the parish could not accommodate'.[408] This is a particularly interesting case - and of great contemporary relevance – because it portrays parochial guilds as a church-sponsored response to changing dynamics of social space, which integrated with its existing territorial arrangements. In some circumstances, he notes, parochial institutions owed 'their very survival' to the guild network.[409]

The strongly 'religious' nature of local society in pre-Reformation England, unsurprisingly, comes across plainly in recent studies[410] - an aspect which can easily depict the parish as an exalted form of overtly Christian society, from which it descended into the mundane apparatus of local government during the Tudor period. Whilst the close interplay of Catholic doctrine and local society were the explicit cause behind, for example, the outlawing of guilds in 1547 ('for

[406] *English Parish*, c.7; *People of the Parish*, c.4.
[407] Gervase Rosser, 'Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages', in Susan Wright (ed.) *Parish*, p.33.
[408] *Ibid.,* p.33.
[409] *Ibid*., p.41.
[410] The parish guild in Baldock (the subject for Rosser's above research), for example, promoted its essentially practical fundraising objects with the offering of an indulgence for participants. *Ibid.,* p.29

devising and phantasinge vayne opinions of Purgatorye'[411]), it is vital not to overplay what French calls the 'harmony and fraternity'[412] of the medieval parish, whose hallowing of 'profane' society could, as Palliser (1988) notes[413], frequently become the source of significant local tensions.

The secular parish, 1500-1834

As was observed with regard to its national vocation, the Tudor reforms that dismantled the medieval 'sacred' parish also transformed and enhanced its secular neighbourhood function, in a reorganization of local government that culminated in the Elizabethan Poor Law Act of 1601, but continuing until its successor in 1834. In the intervening centuries, the parish (and its executive, the vestry[414]) accrued a bewildering array of social services (the licensing of public houses, for example, or the provision of fire engines) in addition to basic obligations like the repair and upkeep of highways and church buildings - and, crucially, the funding and allocation of 'indoor' and 'outdoor' poor relief.[415] In short, the parish became, as Tate (1969) puts it, 'the territorial basis for community service'.[416] Successive legislation, when harnessed to the 'Protestant ethics of civility and obedience' gave, in Steve Hindle's words 'enormous discretionary authority' to parish officers.[417] This, as Gary Gibbs (1997) comments in relation to its role in Tudor London, saw the parish fixed as the 'fundamental institution' in local government, such that:

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411 *Ibid,,* p.45.
412 French, *People of the Parish*, p.22.
413 In Wright, *Parish*, p.11. Palliser records instructions given to parish priests in the fourteenth century not to allow 'markets and fairs in churchyards, or games or stone-throwings, or those dissolute dances and inhonest songs customarily performed on the vigils of certain feasts.'
414 Tate notes scholarly disagreement regarding the origin of the vestry, but supports the Webbs' dating of its inception to 1507. In *Parish Chest*, p.14.
415 For a survey of these responsibilities, cf. P.D.Thompson, *Parish*, c.12.
416 *Parish Chest*, p.5.
417 Steve Hindle, 'A Sense of Place? Becoming and Belonging in the Rural Parish 1550-1650', in Alexandra Shepard & Phil Withington (eds.), *Communities in Early Modern England* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000), p.98.

> When Londoners organised responses to the many formidable problems which beset their city, it was usually at the parish level.[418]

As an index of the transition from the pre-Reformation period, Gibbs highlights the City of London budget, of which, in the fifteenth century, over half had, staggeringly, been spent on ''ecclesiastical items' for the decoration of churches and chantries. 'All this had changed' by the mid-sixteenth century, he concludes.[419] South of the River Thames, a similar situation pertained, according to Boulton (1987), whose study of the London Borough of Southwark reveals the bewildering diversity of roles accorded to vestry officers, including 'keeping the marketplace clear and whipping beggars from the parish'.[420] A similar study of South London in the Elizabethan era, by Ian Archer (2003) also charts the emergence of the parish vestry as what he terms 'the cockpit of local government'[421], but offers a helpfully nuanced account of the overlapping communities of which the parish was but one. This is a persistent finding at all stages of its historical geography, which 'parochial vision'[422] should not obscure. The more deeply parochial life is explored, the greater the degree of both local complexity and regional variation that appear, as studies by Nicola Whyte (2007) and Angus Winchester (2000) affirm.[423] Because of this, Archer warns:

> There are serious problems in regarding the parish as defining the boundaries of local community, particularly in an urban context. No geographical area will satisfactorily describe the boundaries of a local social system in the sense of the area within which the social relationships of inhabitants were constructed because it will not include all the termini of the social relationships involved.[424]

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[418] In French, *English Parish*, p.163.
[419] *Ibid.,* pp.168-9.
[420] Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society: A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, CUP, 1987), p.266.
[421] Ian W.Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, CUP, 2003) p.169.
[422] Cf. Nick Spencer's book of the same name.
[423] Nicola Whyte, *Landscape, Memory and Custom*; A.Winchester, 'Dividing Lines in a moorland landscape: territorial boundaries in upland England', *Landscapes* 1:2 (2000), pp.16-32. Winchester demonstrates how, in the 'Northern uplands' parochial organisation was much more complex, interwoven with and subdivided by townships and other settlement patterns.
[424] *Ibid.,* p.82.

Similarly to the parochial guilds in the preceding centuries, the livery companies emerge in Archer's account as offering a more network-based, associational form of common identity, alongside other territorial divisions - notably precincts and wards. Nevertheless, among these other bonds of fellowship and locality, Archer is compelled to acknowledge that 'there is a strong case for asserting the primary importance of ties to the parish'[425], especially in binding people to a sense of local belonging. Interestingly, as Boulton displays, again with regard to seventeenth century Southwark, this could serve as a means of opening such community to those who might otherwise be, in effect, placeless:

> Such an institution by fulfilling its role as 'a gathering of neighbours' may have counteracted the dislocating influences of heavy immigration by acting as a 'home from home for first generation immigrants'.[426]

At the heart of this local preeminence lay a fairly unassailable complex of welfare and governance, combined with social customs and rituals of behaviour ('neighbourliness' being paramount among them[427]) that not only reflected or enhanced, but also *produced* neighbourhood in Early Modern English communities. The result, proposes Steve Hindle, was an 'internalised' sense of place:

> The parish was the locale in which community was constructed and reproduced, perhaps even consecrated ... If, as the new sociology insists, society is a process constantly reproduced by its members, then in early modern England the parish was *the* arena in which structure ritual and agency combined to create and maintain (and perhaps even to challenge) a highly localised sense of belonging.[428]

Especially in rural areas, the confluence of these currents was the enduring idea of *settlement*. Snell (2006) describes the practical definition of settlement as:

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[425] *Ibid.,* p.83.
[426] Boulton quotes Wrightson in this excerpt, in *English Society 1580-1680* (Abingdon, Routledge, 1982) p.213.
[427] Keith Wrightson underlines the centrality of 'neighbourliness' in early modern social ethics in Griffiths, Fox & Hindle, *The Experience of Authority*, c.1.
[428] Hindle, *Becoming and Belonging*, p.96.

> The eligibility to receive poor relief in a parish or township where one had gained that status (i.e. *of* settlement).[429]

From their institution in the late seventeenth century, to their abolition in the mid-nineteenth century, the settlement laws (with the accompanying vagrancy legislation that effectively tied landless poor to a particular parish) generated, Snell argues, a complex and deeply hierarchical system of 'belonging' in which, he writes, ''home' was a term of parish attachment'.[430] What Snell calls the 'eligibility to belong' in parish terms proved an exceptionally durable component of English society, surviving the reconfiguration of poor relief in the nineteenth century right up the formation of the Welfare State. Snell notes how, as late as 1932, a handbook for local welfare officers states:

> The place of settlement is the place to which a person 'belongs'. To such a place he may be removed; from such a place he may not be removed.[431]

The settlement system was, however, riddled with paradoxes and irregularities that resist any easy or idealised equation of 'parish' with 'neighbourhood'. Chief among these must be the sense in which, whilst giving clear definition to local belonging, settlement corralled the poor into an enforced, and dependent place within the community. This, according to Steve Hindle (2000), denoted the 'dark parish', which gave a double-edge to its communal ideal. Hindle's summary is worth quoting in full:

> In all these respects, the unit of obligation and control was the little commonwealth of the parish, which effectively became a welfare republic, the moral and physical boundaries of which had to be effectively policed. Of course the ancient settled poor of the parish lay at the heart of the community and were accordingly treated benevolently and sympathy by their rate-paying neighbours. But if the local community was compassionate its compassion had a hard edge, and the realities of relief at the margins (where communities are always tested and

[429] Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.85.
[430] *Ibid.,* p.87.
[431] *Ibid.,* p.159.

> new social identities formed) were grudging, mean and tainted by fear and suspicion.[432]

At the other end of the social scale, Snell notes, 'core belonging' had, by the end of the nineteenth century, increasingly come to be defined and demonstrated by ownership of property.[433] Among the ironies of the settlement system was the fact that the gradual repeal of settlement law between 1795 and 1876 - especially the abolition of the poor's 'removability' - in many cases had the opposite of the desired effect, fostering the growth of an urban working class (who felt that they now had greater social security away from the parish) and often relocating those who 'belonged' to one parish to another by virtue of the new Poor Law Unions.[434]

The unsettled parish 1834-94

Whilst 'setting in place further administrative machinery that began to transcend the parish and the vestry', according to Snell (2006) [435], the New Poor Law of 1834 – variously described as 'a watershed for the parish'[436] and the 'death of the parish'[437] in welfare terms, for its amalgamation of parish-based relief into Poor Law Unions[438] - epitomised the contradictory forces to which the parish was subject in the nineteenth century. As Jonathan Barry (1988) demonstrates in his study of parishes in eighteenth century Bristol, it was in urban areas that the cracks in the Anglican consensus first made its monopoly of secular government seem untenable. Barry writes:

> Both the city and parish held a dual role (i.e. both secular and religious) and some kind of church establishment to express this unity seemed desirable to most. But religious pluralism, and the political divisions this engendered, increasingly meant

[432] Hindle, *Becoming and Belonging*, p.99.
[433] *Parish and Belonging*, p.158.
[434] *Ibid*., pp.158-9.
[435] *Parish and Belonging*, p.71.
[436] *Ibid.,* pp.483-84.
[437] Sidney & Beatrice Webb in *The Parish and The County* (London, 1963), pp.171-72, quoted in Fletcher, *Parish Boundary*, p.178.
[438] Cf. Derek Fraser, *The New Poor Law* (London, Macmillan, 1976).

> that the ... parish administration became the focus of conflict, which seemed to threaten civic unity. This encouraged initiatives to bypass the parish in various areas of town life.[439]

In addition, the pattern of medieval parishes, largely unchanged by the 1851 census[440], not only became hopelessly inadequate for the purposes of local administration in the modern era, but was also marked by glaring regional inequalities. The census verified this in no uncertain terms:

> Parishes are, in many instances inextricably intermingled; and they vary in population from single families to tens of thousands of families; in extent, from a few hundreds of acres to many thousands of acres.[441]

However, the irony was that, when the – arguably long overdue – creation of new parishes began in the nineteenth century, this often had the effect of loosening long-established communal bonds. Snell explains the paradox of such reforms thus:

> In some ways they underline the vitality of the parish as a reconceivable and adaptable entity ... Yet they disrupted relatively clear-cut, integrated units of local attachment, in which lay affairs had a spiritual overlay ... They complicated and confused ideas of parish belonging, they undercut the parish as a moral ideal, and they splintered hitherto reciprocal and conjoint features of local life.[442]

Whilst inaugurating a legislative process that slowly eroded parochialism – the 1836 Tithe Commutation Act, the abolition of church rates in 1868 and so on[443] – the amendment of the Poor Law (and the protracted problems of its implementation) also indicates the continued dependence of the state upon the

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[439] Jonathan Barry, 'The parish in civic life: Bristol and its churches 1640-1750', in Susan Wright (ed.) *Parish*, p.171.
[440] Snell and Ell note 'significant parochial discontinuities' of only 5% between the 1676 'Compton' census and that of 1851. In *Rival Jerusalems*, p.251.
[441] Census of 1851, cited in Darby *A New Historical Geography of England*, p.531.
[442] Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, p.370.
[443] E.R.Norman usefully weighs this legislation in *Church & Society*, pp.109-122; also Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* Part II (2nd edn., London, A&C Black, 1972), pp. 194-6. Woodward (1938) saw the 1868 Act as the point after which 'the parish as a unit of government fell into decay'. E.L.Woodward, *The Age of Reform: 1815-1870* (Oxford, OUP, 1938), p.451.

parish system as the nucleus of social service. For Snell, the continuation of parish-based 'outdoor' relief (that is, welfare based on financial or other donations, rather than the workhouse) particularly encapsulates what he describes as the 'on-going dominance of parochial localism in welfare provision'.[444]

Despite the fact that, in rural areas especially, the 'the old union of sacred and secular was not to appearances a dream of the past', as Chadwick (1972) put it, the legislative current nevertheless continued to head in only one direction during the Victorian era. The 1870 Education Act, inaugurating the state provision of education, and the 1894 Local Government Act were landmarks in this process. The latter – dubbed 'a bill for the spoliation of the Church of England' by critics[445] – is particularly significant for the question at hand, because of its effective separation of the secular and ecclesiastical functions of the parish. This act, tackling what Snell calls 'all the confusing geographical miscellanea of Victorian local government'[446], sought clarity by transferring to the civil parish (or district, in urban areas) the bulk of the Anglican Church's statutory responsibilities – for example, in the management of burial grounds or the administration of local charities. With the incumbent relieved of his obligation to be chairman of the parish council and the vestry shorn of its powers, the 1894 Act represents a hinge between eras, which, according to R.W.Ambler (2000):

> officially ended the close interrelationship between religious and civil affairs that had characterised the English parish from the 16th century … (It) was, in effect, the local disestablishment of the Church of England.[447]

Instrumental in this 'secularising' process[448], perhaps ironically, was the challenge brought by the rise of other Christian denominations. The Catholic

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[444] Snell, *Parish & Belonging*, p.336.
[445] in Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, p.196.
[446] Snell, *Parish & Belonging*, p.445.
[447] R.W.Ambler, *Churches, Chapels and Parish Communities of Lincolnshire, 1660-1900* (Lincoln, History of Lincolnshire Committee, 2000), p.2. Cf. also Snell, *ibid*., p.446. Nevertheless, E.R.Norman notes how the idea of the 'secular' parish lingered on, post-1894. In *Church and Society in England 1770-1970* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976), p.54.
[448] E.R.Norman views the legislation in this light in *Church & Society*, p.219.

Relief Act of 1829, the extension of the franchise, after 1832, to include nonconformists, and the vitality of dissenting churches, especially in the new towns and cities, made increasingly untenable the Elizabethan ideal of 'uniformity and conformity' in religion – and, by extension, the Anglican control of local social service. For Callum Brown (2001), the critical contribution of evangelical piety in this loosening of establishment ties lay in its stress upon the individual as free moral agent. This it was that gave Victorian voluntarism its primary motive force and, in Brown's words 'broke the mental chains of the *ancien regime*'.[449]

In an unprecedented empirical study, Snell (2003, 2006) offers gravestones in parish churchyards as an index of the shifting sense of parochial affiliation during this period. In particular, he alights on the common phrase 'of this parish' as an epigram to the deceased's name as, he argues, a more precise indicator of belonging than the parish registers more commonly employed in local research.[450] Whist marriage registers, for example, tend simply to indicate residence at the time of marriage, Snell considers 'of this parish' to sound deeper echoes of local belonging:

> When we read gravestones which say 'of this parish', we are surely receiving a stronger message: this seems to indicate greater rootedness to locality than underlay some parish-register usage of the term. Nobody dying and being buried in a parish which they were a temporary sojourner would have any obvious motive to have 'of this parish' inscribed on a monumental stone, nor would their relatives. A very certain, enduring and meaningful attachment to place was being chipped into stone and inscribed to posterity by such a memorial statement.[451]

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[449] Callum Brown, *Death*, p.36. Frank Prochaska (2006) concurs: 'evangelicals ran perhaps as many as three out of four voluntary societies during the second half of the nineteenth century'. In *Christianity & Social Service*, p.13.

[450] For the genealogical potential of parochial studies, including maps of each parish in England, cf. also Cecil Humphery-Smith (ed.) *The Phillimore Atlas and Index of Parish Registers* (Chichester, Phillimore, 1984).

[451] K.D.M.Snell, 'Gravestones, Belonging and Local Attachment in England', *Past & Present* 179 (2003), p.101. This study was later incorporated into *Parish and Belonging*.

Charting the incidence of 'of this parish' in selected graveyards, Snell notices fascinating fluctuations in epitaphs linking people with place: from about 10 per cent of memorials in the first half of the eighteenth century (when, he argues, it would simply have been assumed that the deceased was 'of this parish' obviating the need for its inclusion), through a high of some 40 per cent in the period 1860-90 (when greater local mobility - and no doubt, changing burial customs - encouraged parochial specification) to 'well below 10 per cent' by the late twentieth century.[452] In his explanation of this evidence, Snell concludes that:

> The parish, once the key unit of local governance and the organizing area of most people's secular and religious lives, has become a relic of its former self.[453]

The invisible neighbourhood 1894-1948

Perhaps the crux of the parish's problems in the nineteenth century was what Perry (1972) calls the 'new fabric of settlement' that rapidly transformed the social landscape.[454] Considering the decline in 'of this parish' inscriptions into the twentieth century, Snell remarks:

> Preoccupation after 1890 with national and imperial issues ... commonly made very local ties to place seem antiquated at all cultural levels. 'Parochial', like 'provincial', was one of the newly disparaging words of the later nineteenth century.[455]

Such pejorative associations of 'parish' were, he adds, compounded by the anti-parochialism of writers such as Dickens and Chadwick, for whom it was inextricably linked to the tyrannies of the New Poor Law. In both church and society, then, the twentieth century saw the parish's growing 'invisibility' as an acknowledged mainstay of English neighbourhood. To some degree this has been

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[452] *Ibid.,* p.116.
[453] *Ibid*., p.121.
[454] P.J.Perry, *A Geography of 19th-Century Britain* (London, Batsford, 1975), pp.44-48.
[455] *Ibid.,* p127. Julia Stapleton notes this early-twentieth century anti-localism in *Conversation of England*, pp.617-34.

recovered in a series of local studies over the last thirty years, which have considered in detail the impact upon churches of increased state welfare provision. While most of these concentrate on the years before 1914, are usually ecumenical in focus and are almost exclusively London-based, they shed useful light onto Church of England's changing role.[456]

The fundamental matter arising from each of these is whether this *separation* of sacred and secular agencies at the local level necessarily involved a *decline* in the social service offered by the parish. It altered it, without question – perhaps immeasurably – but did it *reduce* what has recently been termed the 'community value' of the Church of England?[457] After all, the partial separation of church and state in 1919 had been a matter of 'life and liberty', not of death – and, in his study of the South London borough of Lambeth, Jeffrey Cox notes that the 'decay' of the vestry, whilst reducing its civic role, also 'provided an opportunity for the Church of England to strike out on its own'.[458] Although his overall portrayal is of 'a church in retreat', which, especially in the interwar years, found itself merely 'filling the gaps' in state provision, Cox is clear in resisting what he calls 'the inadequate generalization that 'the welfare state killed off religion'.[459]

A similarly nuanced picture is painted by Jeremy Morris (1993), in his study of the neighbouring London borough of Croydon, *Religion and Urban Change: Croydon 1840-1914*. Like Cox, Morris also emphasises the processes of social differentiation, here accompanying the rapid suburbanisation of Croydon in the mid-nineteenth century and its transition from semi-rural parish to metropolitan borough. Morris underlines the 'sheer weight of Anglican dominance' in Croydon's local government, in which the vestry existed as 'the nexus of religion

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[456] Cf. Jeffrey Cox, *English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870-1930* (Oxford, OUP, 1982); Jeremy Morris, *Religion and Urban Change: Croydon, 1840-1914* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 1992); S.C.Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark c.1880-1939* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999) and Stephen Yeo's study of Reading: *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (London, Croom Helm, 1976).
[457] Lynda Barley, *Community Value* (London, CHP, 2007).
[458] Cox, *English Churches*, p.183.
[459] *Ibid*., pp.210-13. The process of social differentiation, central to secularisation theory, finds strong endorsement in Cox's account of Lambeth, being particularly evident in his description of a developing professionalism in social work – especially through the evolving role of the Charity Organisation Society, which came to replace the amateur philanthropy of the parish visitors.

and political activism under the parochial system'.[460] The increasing redundancy of this system, owing to its combination of intransigent landed interest and unrepresentative leadership, saw the rise, Morris contends, of a new breed of 'local state' that saw the old 'Anglican oligarchy' superseded by a new 'municipal elite'.[461] One inevitable consequence of thus shifting the centre of local political gravity away from the Church of England was, he suggests:

> to set firmer boundaries to what was to be regarded as the legitimate sphere of religious activity.[462]

An increasingly sectarian outlook was, therefore, unavoidable and a significant conclusion of Morris's case is that the early twentieth century found the churches tending towards social programmes that were concerned with *endogenous* rather than *exogenous* growth – typically what might termed 'softer' communal and leisure programmes (uniformed organisations, for example) rather than 'hard' responsibilities – poor relief, for example, or the upkeep of highways. To some extent the historical geographer Rex Walford (2006) takes up the story where Morris leaves it, in his fascinating study of suburban Middlesex between 1918 and 1945. Rare in viewing the parish church in the interwar years as more than merely a postscript to its Victorian heyday, Walford argues that, on the contrary, the Church of England 'did surprisingly well' in adapting to the rapid extension of Greater London:

> not only sustaining its presence in new districts (sometimes against considerable odds) but also recovering some lost ground from former generations and playing a key role in the development and maintenance of new communities as they formed.[463]

Three things in particular strike home from his account: the first being the robustness and speed of the Anglican Church's response to suburban growth,

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[460] Morris, *Religion and Urban Change,* p.107.
[461] Morris, *Religion*, pp.175-87.
[462] *Ibid.,* p.155.
[463] Rex Walford, *The Growth of 'New London' in Suburban Middlesex and the Response of the Church of England* (Lampeter, Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), p.324.

which saw some 49 new parishes being created between 1923 and 1944. The scale and pace of the mission – echoing that of a century earlier to urbanisation[464] and with no evident loss of zeal or sense of communal responsibility – is matched, secondly, by the vitality of the social programme being offered. One of the new churches considered in detail, St Alban's North Harrow, appears typical - from which Walford records the comment of one new parishioner:

> We were pleased to find the new church so lively. It was the centre of life in the district. There were all sorts of organisations to belong to.[465]

Such observations are endorsed elsewhere in the district [466], although, from Walford's analysis, it is clear, thirdly, that the social service so energetically embarked upon by Middlesex parish churches principally falls within Morris's category of 'endogenous growth' – that which is concerned, in other words, with the radial spread of church life into the community (Walford identifies, for example, five 'rings' of church involvement in the neighbourhood, spreading outwards[467]) rather than the 'exogenous' sharing of civic administration which symbolised the parish's role in the former period. As he acknowledges in conclusion:

> What was lost was a general visibility for parson and church in the wider community issues – and into the vacuum would eventually step the new borough authorities.[468]

Such visibility, however, was arguably not 'lost' in the 'New London' suburbs, because it had never existed there. The absence of its historic role in local government, while serving to excise the parish from most secular social histories of the period, plainly did not destroy Anglican social service in these communities: rather, regrouped it around the liturgical and communal centre

[464] Cf. Callum Brown, *Death*, c.2.
[465] *Ibid.,* p.155.
[466] Cf. Donald Gray, *Earth and Altar*.
[467] Walford, *New London*, p.357.
[468] *Ibid.*, p.380.

that, in Middlesex at least, continued to be a vital force in the formation of neighbourhood.

Despite the fact that local variegation has been a defining feature of English religion[469], there remains, according to Snell and Ell (2000) 'an inadequate understanding of spatial patterns of religion' among secular academics, whose 'predilection for national rather than local description' undermines an accurate assessment of the church's declining social influence. The latter, they contend, is a 'local matter'.[470] The above studies firmly endorse this view, although the dearth of primary accounts in the period after 1930 is indicative – not so much of the death of the parish, but of three ailments, common to old age, which tend to frustrate an accurate diagnosis of this period. These may be characterised, firstly, as *amnesia* – the 'editing out' of the distinctive contribution made to civil society by the parish church in the twentieth century.[471] The ecclesiastical counterpart to such local lacunae is a peculiarly Anglican *nostalgia* – 'the religious lining of the national myth'[472] as Adrian Hastings puts it, which can skew an accurate reading of parish history. This is regularly accompanied, thirdly, by a certain *hypochondria* – the Church's obsessive preoccupation with its own decline, which, as Brown and others attest, has been a clear motive behind statistical analysis of religion in Britain since the 1851 census.[473]

A snapshot of the parochial history of Christ Church, Gipsy Hill, one of the Lambeth parish churches cited in Jeffrey Cox's above study, yields telling evidence of at least two of these conditions at work. The church's centenary history, for example (published in 1967) describes the interwar years wistfully as 'the golden age of church going'[474], in which:

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[469] Explored in B.I.Coleman, *The Church of England in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: A Social Geography* (London, The Historical Association, 1980). Cf also John Gay, *Geography of Religion in England* (London, Duckworth, 1971).
[470] Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p.2ff; p.395ff.
[471] *Ibid.,* p.ix.
[472] Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity* (London, SCM, 1991), p.77. Hastings sees this as 'one of the strange recurring qualities of English religion'.
[473] Cf. Brown, *Death*, c.2, for evidence of misplaced statistical pessimism.
[474] Christ Church Gipsy Hill, *Centenary 1867-1967*, p.6.

> A Christian community whose whole life was concerned…not only (with) spiritual sustenance, but their social life as well … would that it might now be so! [475]

The parish magazines from this halcyon time, however, bristle with warnings from the vicar of that community's impending moral collapse. Displaying what Patrick Wright has called 'the grieving hindsight of the 1930s'[476] the incumbent writes, in August 1937:

> As I look out upon the parish, I realize that the church is definitely in touch with only a small minority of the people.

Commenting on the 'prevailing indifference' to the 'precious old paths' of Christian society, he concludes:

> The fact remains that the people of England are living apart from the church.[477]

The parish records suggest that the truth lay, in all probability, somewhere between these twin poles of exaltation and despair. Indeed, the chief impression given is of *continuity*, not least in relation to social service. An interesting index of the latter appears in the progress of the Gipsy Hill 'Poor and Parochial Fund', the 'general purse of the parish', which, according to the 1917 parish accounts:

> dispenses to needy homes with the best judgement that the vicar and the district visitors can exercise and gives a great amount of practical relief and comfort in this way.[478]

Two things are notable about this fund during the period in question: first, that, despite the concerns of the Vestry about falling receipts, the budget remained at a healthy level, standing at £298 in 1900 and £328 in 1933. Secondly, the accounts show, from 1919, an increasing proportion of the Poor and Parochial Fund as

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[475] *Ibid*., p.6. Jeffrey Cox notes the diversity and activism of the Christ Church social programme at this time in *English Churches*, p.41.
[476] Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country* (Oxford, OUP, 2009), p.85.
[477] *Christ Church Gipsy Hill Parish Magazine*, 1936-44.
[478] *Christ Church Financial Reports*, 1917-1933. This relic of the 'secular' parish was only recently closed down.

'administered through the agency of the Charity Organisation Society' rather than the direct control of the vicar. While fragmentary, such evidence strengthens the impression that gradual separation of local welfare provision from the Church of England meant the *realignment*, but not necessarily *decline* of its local charity.

The persistent parish: 1948-

Its relative obscurity in twentieth century scholarship is one reason why, as David Martin acknowledged in the 1980s, 'Sociologists have not done a great deal of work on the parish'.[479] Certainly it barely merits mention in his significant early study *A Sociology of English Religion* (1967), although this does admit the need for future research into England's 'local ecclesiastical history and religious social geography'.[480] Perhaps, as David Clark (1971) proposed, the dual identity of the parish as both a civil and ecclesiastical entity has deterred sociological inquiry. Clark considered that parochial studies were hindered by the parish's existence as something of a 'contradiction in terms', whereby:

> The sociologist who is asked to study the parish today is faced with investigating a unit which in many places is of declining ecclesiastical viability and frequently of little secular relevance. [481]

Paying insufficient attention to the local character of English Christianity only reinforces the mistaken impression of its irrelevance: for one is, quite simply, 'looking in the wrong place'. This is especially troublesome given that, as Jenkins (2006) asserts, attention to a particular territory is a defining feature of Anglican tradition and practice.[482] When the academic focus on locality is restored, it is significant how the parochial emerges from obscurity, as the – admittedly few – studies of postwar parish life have demonstrated. Perhaps unsurprisingly, neighbourhood once again comes to the fore in these, as Neal and Walters (2008)

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[479] In Giles Ecclestone (ed.), *The Parish Church?* p.44.
[480] David Martin: *A Sociology of English Religion* (London, Heinemann, 1967) p.123.
[481] David Clark, 'The Sociological Study of The Parish', *The Expository Times* 82 (1971) p.296.
[482] In *An Experiment in Providence*, p.24.

pick up in their study of 'Conviviality and community-making in the English countryside'. This sociological study notes how the creation of one 'parish map' enhanced 'the convergence of locality and sociality' among those interviewed.[483] Another rural study, by Winter and Short (1994), is significant in avoiding the usual criteria for religiosity and focusing instead on attitudes towards the Church of England, and its clergy in particular. Their sample survey, drawn from village parishioners in five rural dioceses revealed a high level of identification with the church – 62% considering that they 'belonged' to the Church of England.[484] Winter and Short conclude that, by using such indices:

> we have revealed a relatively, and perhaps surprisingly, low level of secularisation.[485]

Whilst acknowledging the enduring 'social fact' of the English country church, Timothy Jenkins (1999) also provides a fascinating account of Christian society persisting in a suburban community – the parish of Kingswood, in Bristol. As a social anthropologist (and Anglican priest), Jenkins argues that the prevailing 'narrative of decline' is inadequate because it herds empirical data into 'objective' external categories that they may not fit. A social-anthropological approach, by contrast, is *indigenous* to a particular community and releases local data to define its own meanings and categories.

Thus 'religion', for Jenkins, is not necessarily a helpful category to use: regarding the parish in question, his overriding question is instead 'what is it like to live in Kingswood?' This is answered through an extended study of 'The Kingswood Whit Walk' a local church custom in which 'personality, territoriality and local history' combine. Although the walk is an 'act of witness' by the local churches, Jenkins emphasises how:

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[483] Sarah Neal & Sue Walters, Rural Social Belonging and Rural Social Organisations: Conviviality and Community-Making in the English Countryside, *Sociology* 42:2 (2008) p.285ff.
[484] Michael Winter & Christopher Short, 'Believing and Belonging: Religion in Rural England', *The British Journal of Sociology* 44:4 (1993) p.641.
[485] *Ibid.,* p.648.

> All Kingswood is present, the respectable and rowdy, in a celebration of local identity … (which) has different meanings for different members of the community.[486]

'Religion' is deliberately kept in the background of this study – not because it is unimportant, but in order to appreciate its local dimensions more clearly. Through the lens of the Whit Walk, Jenkins perceives how issues of belief, belonging and social ethics (characterised here by the terms 'fecklessness' and 'respectability') all converge in a manner that is peculiar to this parish. Only after such careful attention, Jenkins (2006) later reflects, can religion 're-emerge' in a way that is locally authentic.[487] Jenkins' study is extremely useful (even if now a little dated) in being a rare example of a single parish being studied as a microcosm of English parochialism in practice – a contemporary analogy to the boundary perambulations of a former era. In so doing, he underlines the need for local particularity to inform generalisations about religious trends, and not vice versa. Commenting on their 'misrecognition' in modern social studies, he concludes, drily:

> Communities of the kind studied here were supposed to have disappeared … (but) have long existed behind the appearance of 'being about to disappear'.[488]

Such examples should, of course, be set alongside others where the picture was not quite so encouraging for the church, such as Geoffrey Ahern's (1987) and Laurie Green's (1995) studies of Anglican belief and practice among white working-class residents in East London[489] and Malcolm Torry's (2004) useful collection of reflections on parochial ministry in the Diocese of Southwark. From his work with the South London Industrial Mission, Torry observes that, despite a 'distancing' of ecclesiastical institutions from 'other social realities', the parish:

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[486] Jenkins, *Religion*, p.99.
[487] Jenkins, *Providence*, p.101.
[488] Jenkins, *Religion*, p.216.
[489] Ahern & Davie, *Inner City God,* p.131; Laurie Green in Peter Sedgwick (ed.), *God in the City* (London, Mowbray, 1995) pp.72-92. Green's study of 'Christian religious experience' in Poplar also reveals what he calls 'a deeper hidden life' closely linking a 'sense of God' to a 'sense of place'.

> Has been and still is a bulwark against secularisation in ways that other styles of religious organisation cannot be. [490]

Conclusion: The bounded community

Drawing conclusions from the foregoing, three points are immediately clear. First, that, throughout an extraordinarily long tenure, the parish occupied an unrivalled position as the archetype of English neighbourhood: a fact warmly endorsed by historians from medieval to modern periods. Secondly, despite (and perhaps because of) its deep rooting, the parish proved both resilient and surprisingly adaptive to the changing cultural and political climate, redefining and reasserting its peculiar blend of territory, community and Christian ethics at successive stages when it might otherwise have been abandoned.[491] Thirdly, that, while society at large became, from the nineteenth century onwards, more secular in its vision, the church did not, interestingly, become *less* secular in its own[492]: making the most of its remaining mandate for the 'cure of souls' in a persistent practice of place-formation.

This much is evident. Nevertheless, if 'neighbourhood' is not simply a quantitative descriptor, but a quality of social ethics, there is a moral ambivalence about the parochial record that particularly clings to its bounded nature, accentuated by a narrative from within the church that tends to characterise this as inherently outmoded and restrictive of growth.[493] Key to both is a postmodern geographical narrative that has asked serious questions of the use and abuse of boundary in social structures, two aspects of which are of special pertinence here. The first is that territorial boundaries, as social constructions, are inevitably, 'exercises of

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[490] Torry (ed.), *The Parish*, p.10. Martyn Percy records how 'associational disconnection' is a general feature of modern life, in Simon Coleman & Peter Collins (eds.) *Religion, Identity and Change* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004), p.28.
[491] Beat Kumin observes that, for the parish: 'adaptation and resilience appear as the underlying themes throughout the centuries', *The Communal Age*, p.52.
[492] In F.D.Maurice's terms, whilst the state arguably lost its proper 'anti-secularity', the church did not.
[493] The most historically well-informed of these critiques is Nick Spencer's *Parochial Vision: The Future of the English Parish* (Carlisle, Paternoster, 2004).

power', put in place in order, Massey (2005) writes, 'to establish outsiders – those who do not belong'.[494] Thus it follows that a large part of the work of a human geographer lies in *deconstructing* the social forces that determine where the lines are drawn: a process in which cartography emerges as of vital significance by revealing the multiple ways in which space is culturally and politically represented.[495]

The second relevant aspect of the postmodern critique stresses the more fluid conception of social space than traditional concepts of boundary might allow. Doreen Massey's *For Space* is perhaps the most convincing appraisal of this movement, in which she not only notes the transition from a structuralist approach that robbed space of its dynamism by equating it with a negation of time, but, equally, criticises post-structuralism for not liberating space sufficiently from this straitjacket. The Modernist tendency to contain space by means of boundaries, local and national, is, Massey argues, inherently conservative, all too often 'looking back to a past that never was'. The counterpart of this is a 'persistent tendency to exonerate the local' without regard to the 'flows' of interconnectedness that form any local community.[496]

To what extent does this critique hit home when aimed at the Anglican parish? As with the earlier consideration of Stanley Hauerwas' account of nationalism, the danger is that it misses the mark because the target – usually Modernity - is set too close: never reaching the antiquity and particularities of the English situation. Whilst Massey's critique of Modernist boundaries fits cleanly into, for example, the land enclosures of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, many

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[494] Doreen Massey and Pat Jess (eds.) *A Place in the World?* (Oxford, OUP, 1995), pp.69 & 99. Cf. also David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion,* chapters 5&6.
[495] Cf. David Harvey *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1990), c.15; For the territorial 'rules' that define being 'in place' or 'out of place', see Robert Sack *Power of Place and Space,* p.17; Schreiter, *Local Theologies*, p.54; also Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York, Pantheon, 1980).
[496] Massey, *For Space*, pp.102-3. Interestingly, Beaver records that nonconformists in early modern England rejected the parish boundary as sinful and man-made. In *Parish Communities and Religious Conflict in the Vale of Gloucester, 1590-1690* (Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1998), p.325.

parish boundaries had already existed for a millennium by that stage, being 'among the most durable legacies from the Anglo-Saxon period'.[497]

This said, it is vital that the reality of parochial life is recalled and, to the extent that is was ever a 'structure' in Modern terms, deconstructed, in order to forestall the idealism that all too easily clouds this theme. Incontestably, power interests have been at the heart of parochial definition since the earliest times, as the previous chapter demonstrated. Furthermore, there is a strong case for viewing the parochial system - via the Tudor Poor Laws and, in particular, the 1662 Settlement Act that tied the landless poor to their parish - as a tyranny of locality, a parody of neighbourhood. Raymond Williams (1973) argues powerfully that, whilst the parochial arrangement of poor relief was 'rationalized as the duty of people to care for their own, for their neighbours', the reality of its restrictions on movement were 'insolent indifference to most people's needs'.[498] Its idealization of parochial 'settlement', was, Williams claims, particularly damaging:

> Settlement is indeed easy ... for those who can settle in a reasonable independence. For those who cannot ... it can become a prison: a long disheartening and despair, under an imposed rigidity of conditions.[499]

Whilst the moral force of Williams' case must be heard, undergirding many of the negative connotations of 'parochial' as implying a closed, ethically impoverished, outlook, there are other, more nuanced assessments of the bounded nature of the traditional parish. Indeed, a significant emerging theme in historical parish studies is not only the fact of local variation in, for example, the application of settlement laws (including the long-running historical distinction between 'open' and 'closed' parishes[500]) but the surprisingly adaptive nature of the parochial system to changing social circumstance. Arguing that the enduring idea of the 'self-contained community' is 'at best, a half-truth', Keith Wrightson urges that:

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[497] Winchester *Parish Boundaries*, p.5. David Harvey notes how enclosures 'forcefully transformed the English landscape' – and local society along with it[497]. In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p.254.
[498] *Country and City*, p.84.
[499] *Ibid.,* p.85. Wrightson remarks how, in Early Modern England, 'neighbourliness was confined to the more settled inhabitants'. *English Society*, p.57.
[500] Of which Snell gives a good summary in *Parish and Belonging*, pp.127-8.

> The real strength of social ties must not be held to imply that local communities were either bounded or static.[501]

In assessing the nature and role of the parish boundary in early modern England, Nicola Whyte (2007, 2009) has made the important contention that, contrary to the prevailing opinion that these were an essentially stable system between 1200 and 1800, parish boundaries were, within certain constraints, flexible and, moreover, negotiated by social relationship. Highlighting Angus Winchester's argument that the Ordnance Survey's selection of the parish boundary as the basic administrative unit 'diverted attention away from the existence of a complex, multi-layered web of territories', Whyte considers that it was essentially a practiced, enacted reality, often contested and open to a degree of local agreement, even after the introduction of modern cartography.[502]

The principal theatre for this enactment was the annual Rogationtide 'beating of the bounds', described by Steve Hindle (2008) as:

> the principal means by which the local community, in both the geographical and sociological senses of that problematic term, was defined in early modern England. As a symbolic affirmation of the community of the parish, they had a 'truly Durkheimian significance' representing one of those fleeting moments when society might be observed in the act of describing itself.[503]

In an insightful study, *The Parish Boundary: A Social Phenomenon in Hanoverian England*, David Fletcher (2003) acknowledges the ambivalence of the boundary as agent of, simultaneously, 'territorial threat and social cohesion', noting how the traditional practice of beating the bounds served not only to enhance collective identity but also prevent incursions into the parish from neighbouring

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[501] Wrightson, *English Society*, p.48.
[502] Nicola Whyte, *Landscape, Memory & Custom,* p.170ff; *Inhabiting the Landscape: Place, Custom & Memory 1500-1800* (Windgather Press, Oxford, 2009), c.3. Cf. also Keith Wrightson, *Politics of the Parish*, c.1.
[503] Steve Hindle, 'Beating the Bounds of the Parish: Order, Memory and Identity in the English Local Community, c1500-1700', in Michael J. Halvorson & Karen E. Spierling (eds.), *Defining Community in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008), p.206.

paupers.[504] The paradox seems to be that, in the traditional parish, social inclusion was generated by a measure of social *exclusion*, a fact suggested in Fletcher's concluding remarks:

> Adversity, in the form of external threat to the territorial integrity of a parish, was perhaps the most socially binding process. The dividing function of a parish boundary at one spatial scale could have a bonding role on the people contained within it at the most local level.[505]

Whilst, plainly, the parish boundary could foster what Snell (2006) calls 'the culture of local xenophobia'[506], nevertheless, Fletcher finds that traditional boundary perambulations were, on balance:

> a force more for social cohesion than for division, at least at the intra- parish level; a notion at odds perhaps with the spatial characteristic of the boundary line as literally a division.[507]

The risk that bounded locality will involve 'pulling up the drawbridge'[508] is vital to recognise. However, in Massey's terms it would be 'a failure of spatial imagination' to consider the limits of the parish only in defensive terms, rather than, to borrow a biological metaphor, a kind of 'permeable membrane' that affords the necessary boundary conditions for the very kind of dynamic interrelation she espouses, to flourish.[509] The challenge for the prevailing geographical account of boundaries is thus how to reconstruct and renegotiate them in ways that are socially and ethically positive.[510] Massey's plea for a fluid and 'messy' understanding of space and place is at its most winsome in her desire

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[504] David Fletcher, 'The Parish Boundary: A Social Phenomenon in Hanoverian England', *Rural History* 14:2 (2003), pp.187-89.
[505] *Ibid.,* p.192
[506] *Parish & Belonging,* c.2. Hindle finds that parish boundaries marked an ethical as well as physical delimitation by depicting those beyond the bounds as 'strangers' and, thereby, unsafe. In Shepard & Withinton (eds.), *Communities in Early Modern England*, p.97.
[507] Fletcher*, Parish Boundary,* p.192.
[508] Massey, *For Space*, p.6.
[509] Timothy Gorringe, in conversion with the author, comments 'all boundaries bleed at the edges, they always have'.
[510] Much as Luke Bretherton has recently undertaken with regard to national boundaries. Cf. 'The End of National Borders: Thinking Ethically about Mass Migration', at http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2015/05/20/4239083.htm, accessed 18/6/15.

that spatial configurations should enable the 'thrown togetherness' that offer the chance that 'may set us down next to the unexpected neighbour'.[511] Against the static mapping of human territory, she writes:

> On the road map you won't drive off the edge of your known world. In space as I want to imagine it, you just might.[512]

However, the essential point is that boundaries enable one to do just that – by delineating and describing the 'known world'. Indeed, there is arguably no such thing as a 'known world' without a boundary: personal knowledge always being circumscribed. Boundaries are thus a necessary correlate of human physicality. As John Macmurray (1938) observed, any truly personal, intentional action involves *limitation*, in recognition of our own bounded and particular humanity.[513] Being incarnate, human communities require boundaries much as bodies require skin and they exist in order to enable inclusion, not to frustrate it. For the sake of a clear and gracious worldview, there is a temptation to remove them from sight: to make each one a kind of cultural ha-ha, giving the illusion of free passage until one realises that the ground has disappeared from beneath one's feet. To play boundaries down is not to belong: 'to love everywhere equally is in fact to love nowhere very much', to paraphrase Oliver O'Donovan.[514]

Turning to the Parable of the Good Samaritan (illustrative of numerous episodes in Jesus' geographical ministry across cultural and geographical barriers[515]), O'Donovan, in his influential essay *The Loss of a Sense of Place*[516] shows how the contingent, accidental nature of space-time encounter (the 'as-it-happened' quality of the story) with a stranger is portrayed as coming into conflict with the

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[511] In *For Space*, c.13.
[512] *Ibid.,* p.111.
[513] 'Intentional activity normally involves the limitation of attention': In *Clue to History*, p.13. Similarly, Torsten Hagerstrand notes: 'human beings are divisible, they have restricted mobility and they have limited life-time'[513]. In Chorley (ed.), *Human Geography*, p.78.
[514] O'Donovan, *Sense of Place, p.54.* 'To love everybody in the world equally is in fact to love nobody very much', is the original quote. By contrast, Kierkegaard stresses the 'boundless' nature of neighbourliness. In *Works of Love* (London, Collins, 1962), pp.58-98.
[515] The cross-border encounters with women in John chapter 5 and Mark 7/Matthew 15 being prime examples.
[516] Oliver O'Donovan, 'The Loss of a Sense of Place' in *Irish Theological Quarterly* 55:1 (1989).

strict requirements of religious culture and the 'rules' of territory, whilst at the same time recognizing the constraints and opportunities afforded by the limits of landscape and human settlement. Noting the etymological roots of 'neighbour' in 'nearness', he writes that the parable 'draws our attention to a particular kind of proximity':

> The story takes place on a road, a primary symbol of mankind's ability to master space and impose cultural form upon it, by excluding certain spaces in order to define others ... the challenge of the merciful Samaritan is that neighbourly relation between a Jew and a Samaritan ... In the occasion of immediate proximity by the roadside, there is reconstituted the lost common life of the promised land. That space becomes a place; but in doing so it promises to become the place, *the lost place, which was the proper context of true neighbourliness*.[517]

In Christ's teaching, such boundaries may be seen both as subordinate to the command to love God and neighbour and also as providing the conditions by which practice of that command is made possible and 'real'. The ministry of Jesus does not deny the normativity of social and physical borders, even when it deliberately trespasses over them. As with neighbourhood, so with the nation. Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) has decried the liberal idea that to act morally, 'is to learn to free oneself from social particularity'.[518] On the contrary, he argues:

> 'Where' and 'from whom' I learn my morality turn out to be crucial for the context and nature of moral commitment, as any form of morality will be intimately connected with specific institutional arrangements.[519]

These arrangements, he continues, involve three 'bases': a specific community; its morality – the specific 'goods' enjoyed and pursued by different communities -

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[517] *Ibid.,* p.54. Thus, the neighbour is defined as 'the fellow human being who is bound to us in common sharing of inhabited space'. *Ibid.,* p.47.
[518] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Is Patriotism a Virtue?* p.9.
[519] *Ibid.,* p.8. Cf. F.D.Maurice's ethical view of nationhood, stemming from a Jewish understanding that 'set the divine seal upon that which belongs to a man as a creature of flesh and blood, inhabiting a particular place, having a definite circle of human relations and earthly associations'. *The Kingdom of Christ*, 5:1, p.177.

and the individual's moral sustenance by a particular society. 'Loyalty' to a particular community, he continues, is 'a prerequisite for morality', concluding:

> Deprived of this community I am unlikely to flourish as a moral agent.[520]

All physical boundaries both reflect and reinforce local social contracts, marking out what is perceived to be possible for particular communities. Although dictated by landscape, gated and punctuated by signs, lines and barriers, communities begin as ideas: functioning well only as the surface tension of people pulling together. As such, in Fletcher's description of the historic effect of parochial boundaries, they both 'facilitate and constrain' social life.[521] The challenge facing the parish must not be how to dismantle these, but how to reconfigure them in order to enable social cohesion: to reconceive 'settlement' in the light of contemporary social dynamics.

Robert Frost, in his early poem *Mending Wall*, employs the maxim 'Good fences make good neighbors' – uttered as a gruff refrain by Frost's neighbour - to explore the paradox that boundaries are necessary in order for people to live together. 'Before I built a wall', Frost reflects, ' I'd ask to know what I was walling in or walling out' and, at first, he questions the wisdom of bricking up a boundary where none is needed:

> He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
> My apple trees will never get across
> And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.[522]

Nevertheless, the shared task of maintaining the wall emerges not only as the occasion of their encounter, but as the very fulcrum of Frost's relationship to the old man - the poem concluding with the latter's only rejoinder: 'Good fences make good neighbors'.

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[520] *Ibid.,* pp.10-11. Similarly, Roger Scruton has argued that without the nation, there can be no 'liberal' freedom, in *England and the Need for Nations* (London, Civitas, 2006).
[521] Fletcher, *Parish Boundary*, p.186.
[522] Robert Frost, *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973), p.43.

Chapter 6: The natural parish

Thus far it has been advanced that the Anglican parish is a definitive form of bounded neighbourhood, which, through ancient connection to English national identity, has embodied a blend of sacred and secular community, thereby signifying in theological terms the redemption of all places in Christ. Because all places are produced by what Raymond Williams (1958) described as 'common meanings... writing themselves into the land'[523], the essential remaining component of this synthesis is the physical environment and the enduring relationship of the parochial system with the English landscape. This carries a complex symbolism of soul and soil that must now be analysed.

Gleba

The 1894 Parish Councils Act – the pivotal moment when its civil and ecclesiastical forms were divided – defined the parish as 'that circuit of ground which is committed to the charge of one person or vicar...'.[524] The *groundedness* of the Anglican parish is deeply set within the territorial origins of the Anglo-Saxon *parochia*: from the smallest 'field church' (the phrase in Anglo-Saxon law for churches newly established on lands recently brought under cultivation) to the regional 'head minsters' or cathedrals.[525] As Anthea Jones (2000) avers:

> The territorial pattern of English parishes ... had roots in agricultural practices probably ancient when Augustine landed on the Kent coast in 597.[526]

In particular its bond with the land derived from endowments and revenue required for the upkeep of each type of church: 'soul-scot' (effectively a burial

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[523] From his 1958 essay 'Culture is Ordinary'. Accessed at: http://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/59594_McGuigan__Raymond_Williams.pdf on 15/7/15.
[524] Cited in Tate, *The Parish Chest*, p.10.
[525] Cf. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.148; Dorothy Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1965), p.166.
[526] Anthea Jones, *Parish*, p.15.

fee), 'plough alms' (the penny paid within a fortnight of Easter in respect of each plough-team working in a parish) and also direct donations of land, often to monasteries or dioceses that linked the church's growing wealth with the possession of land.[527] Principal among parish fees was the tithe, the portion of the harvest given – at first voluntarily and, from the tenth century, enforced by secular fines – to the church. Tithing served to etch the emergent parochial system into the landscape, as Pounds explains:

> While most of the obligations to the church were personal, the tithe was territorial. It was generated by land, and parishes had to be bounded in order to determine where tithes should be paid.[528]

The other vital constituent of the early parochial 'field economy' was the original endowment of land given to each church, known as the glebe, from the Anglo-Saxon *gleba*, meaning soil or earth.[529] Whereas tithes were for profit, glebe was for subsistence and presumed to have been cultivated by the priest himself.[530] Eventually incorporated into the rector's freehold and, in many parishes, surviving today, one consequence of the glebe field was that, Stenton writes:

> At a very early date the priest was admitted into agricultural partnership with the village community which he served.[531]

This 'bundle of rights'[532] or 'rectory' that supported the medieval parish priest (including the 'benefice' - the incumbent's material reward, derived from *beneficium*, another landholding term) rooted the pastoral economy of the Anglo-Saxon parish firmly in an inseparable bond between a community and the lands upon which its livelihood depended. The ecclesiastical benefice, still founded

[527] Godfrey notes the importance of these endowments. *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.328f.
[528] Pounds, *English Parish*, p.31.
[529] Jones, *Parish*, p.16.
[530] Pounds makes this point. *English Parish*, p.214.
[531] Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.152.
[532] Jones, *Parish*, p.16.

upon the economic subsistence of each parish, is, Godfrey writes, 'essentially a variant of this ... feudalistic practice'.[533]

What Pounds calls 'the accidents of manorial history' thus played a leading role in defining the bounded 'shape' of parishes, which, in turn has given distinctive form to the English landscape.[534] Everitt (1985) has shown how regional variations in landholding affected the types of parish and, thereby, the type of landscape formed. He distinguishes between 'manorial' parishes, such as those in Northamptonshire, where two-thirds of the land formed part of great estates under landed magnates and 'freeholding' parishes in other areas, such as Kent, where a far higher proportion of the land came to be owned by yeoman freeholders, well into the Modern Era.[535] Varying parish typologies, he concludes, left a varying social and physical 'footprint' according to region.

What appears as singular, however, is not simply the continuity to the present day of many ancient patterns of parochial boundary – their 'astonishing age'[536] a generally recognised visible feature of the landscape - but the way in which their subtler, more 'invisible' effects upon communal behaviour also persist. The ancient practice of beating the bounds, highlighted earlier, provides fascinating examples of this. As the embodied circumscription of neighbourhood, boundary perambulations were of fundamental significance for the traditional parish: 'corporate manifestations of the village community', in Keith Thomas' words[537], which, Fletcher (2003) points out, required of local parsons a keen sense of landscape and topography.[538] This was, of course, essential before accurate written maps, at a time when 'knowledge of parish boundaries often resided

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[533] Godfrey, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.329.
[534] Pounds, *English Parish*, p.71. Affirmed by Smith, Cook & Hutton: 'a walk along a parish boundary can still reveal the outline - sometimes even the natural features - of an Anglo-Saxon estate', *English Parish Churches*, p.15.
[535] Alan Everitt, *Landscape and Community in England* (London, Continuum, 1985), pp.4-6. Everitt notes the consequent higher level of nonconformity in religion in Kent and the more evident alliance of squire and parson in Northamptonshire.
[536] Tom Greeves, quoted in Herron, Jackson and Johnson, *Interpreting Rurality*, p.71.
[537] *Religion and The Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973), p.65.
[538] David Fletcher, *Boundary*, p.187. Nicola Whyte concludes that parochial perambulations had 'a major impact on landscape history' in the Norfolk villages that are the focus of her study. *Inhabiting the Landscape*, p.165.

solely in folk memory reinforced by procession'[539], but also meant that the parish became what Fletcher calls the 'basic reporting unit' in the development of local mapping of England in the nineteenth century.[540]

In *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Thomas (1973) argued that this practice, originally a kind of mystic cartography directed towards the 'material benefit' of abundant crops had, by the sixteenth century, become mere custom, in keeping with his thesis of the progressive disenchantment of English life. Whilst the Reformation doubtless accelerated the decay of the practice's more 'Popish' or, indeed, pagan overtones, as Beresford (1971) avers[541], Thomas rather overlooks its evident and ongoing value in enabling communities to internalise and maintain agreed boundaries – and the equally mysterious way in which these can influence the present. Indeed, Nicola Whyte's recent research suggests that, against the prevailing view of their decline, parish perambulations continued in many areas – depending partly upon the rate and extent of common land enclosures - to be a principal means of agreeing communal boundaries.[542]

Beating the bounds thus appears as a fundamental way in which 'parochial space' was both practised and produced in a combination of natural, spiritual and social formation, during which fist fights and ale-gatherings combined with the recital of the Litany and Psalms 103 and 104.[543] Whyte describes the physicality of this process – recognising, touching and hatching marks in familiar natural features – as a 'mnemonic language' through which landscape and local community were learned. One particular demonstration of this, worth describing in detail, pertains to the area of Crystal Palace in South-East London, whose central 'triangle' of roads stands at the intersection of five London boroughs, whose historic intersection was the 'mnemonic' parochial marker of the 'Vicar's Oak'. In his social history of this neighbourhood, Alan Warwick (1972) explores an episode

[539] *Ibid.,* p.183.
[540] *Ibid.,* p.186. Cf. 'Mapping the Imagination' in Rachel Hewitt, *The Map of a Nation*, c.8.
[541] Maurice Beresford notes the 1559 Parliamentary Act, whereby 'the clergy shall once a year at the time accustomed walk about their parishes with the Curate and other substantial men of the parish'. *History on the Ground*, (London, Methuen, 1971), p.29. Fletcher suggests that practical rather than theological underpinnings were now stressed. *Boundary*, p.184.
[542] Nicola Whyte, *Landscape, Memory and Custom*, p.178f; *Inhabiting the Landscape,* c.3.
[543] For the liturgical aspects of parish perambulations, cf. Beresford, *History On The Ground*, p.29.

from 1560 that marked the culmination of a longstanding territorial dispute, played out in their annual beating of the bounds, between 'the Croydon men' and the 'Penge men' as to the precise location of their respective parish borders. During his Rogationtide perambulation of the bounds, Richard Finch, the Vicar of Croydon ('a man of not very determined character'[544]) encountered the equivalent party from Penge and backed down following aggressive accusations of trespass, thus conceding to them a significant portion of land, which remains as the borough boundary to this day.

The episode escalated (and doubtless is so well documented) because the landholders on either side of the boundary were the Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker and Queen Elizabeth, Lady of the Manor of Battersea following the dissolution of the monasteries. Further details aside, two features of this case are particularly noteworthy: firstly, that the practical peculiarity of the current Croydon borough boundary – running along the middle of Church Road in Upper Norwood, to the confusion of municipal services – is, as Warwick writes:

> to some extent the outcome of the perambulations of a vicar in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I who was not sufficiently resolute.[545]

Second, and perhaps of greater interest, is the way in which this particular Church Road has consistently proved to be a site of social tension and boundary conflict: recently becoming both a 'front line' in the 2011 riots and a test case, considered at the 2015 Faith and Place Network Conference, regarding equal access to local government planning procedure for Black Majority Churches, following a longstanding dispute over the conversion for church usage of a former Cinema site along the same stretch of road.[546] Recent research into early

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[544] Alan R. Warwick, *The Phoenix Suburb: A South London Social History* (London, Blue Boar Press, 1982), p.12.
[545] *Ibid*., p15.
[546] The role of this boundary in contemporary disputes over social space is presented by the author at http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xaw22c_crystal-palace-cinema-campaign-publ_news; proceedings and addresses from the recent Faith and Place Network Conference are available at: http://faithandplacenetwork.org/2015/04/29/explorations-speaker-videos-now-online/, accessed 17/6/15.

modern parish boundary conflicts by Nicola Whyte and others[547] suggests that this historic recurrence may not be an isolated example of where the accidents of landscape and the ancient parish converge to influence and, to some degree, explain, present-day patterns of social inclusion.

English pastoral

The 'Christianisation of the landscape' at such an early stage, through the rapid proliferation of church-building in medieval England[548], when allied to the long traditions of national religion and neighbourhood welfare already described, underlies the particular function of the parish church as, in effect, an icon of local rootedness: an impression heightened when the building is surrounded by burial grounds – 'God's Acre', according to custom. As the poet-priest Peter Levi (1982) writes in the essay collection *Second Nature*:

> Our only immortal link with the landscape will be if we are permitted to be buried in it.[549]

Sam Turner's (2006) archeological study of South-West England reveals that England's conversion to Christianity was, so to speak, a monumental 'landscape event' that transformed the physical appearance of the country. By the late pre-Conquest period, he contends:

> The influence of Christian ideology had reached out to the edges of the cultivated land and into the rough ground beyond.[550]

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[547] Whyte, *Landscape, Memory & Custom*, pp.183-186.
[548] Alexandra Walsham uses this phrase to describe the transformation of the English landscape following its conversion to Christianity. In *Reformation of Landscape*, p.26ff.
[549] Peter Levi, in Richard Mabey (ed.), *Second Nature* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1984), p.43. Cf. also Snell, *Gravestones and Local Attachment*. Nicola Whyte notes the practice of 'exchanging the dead' at parish boundaries in instances where the deceased had died beyond the bounds, in order for them to be buried (occasionally *re*buried) in their home parish. In *Landscape, Memory& Custom*, p.182.
[550] Sam Turner, *Making a Christian Landscape: How Christianity Shaped the Countryside in Early Medieval Cornwall, Devon and Wessex* (Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 2006), p.169. Likewise, Nicola Whyte writes that the 'lived environment' of the medieval period 'formed the material

This topographical 'reach' of the English church was extended, Turner claims, not only through the physical construction of churches, crosses and burial grounds, but also through the altered social practices instigated by such a shift in the belief system. In particular, he discerns in the relationship between church and landscape the 'grammar' of settlement, claiming that:

> the ideology of 'settlement' that helped shape the medieval landscape encompassed a Christian view of the world.[551]

Part of this social grammar clearly includes place-names, which, by personalising the landscape, gives distinctive cultural form to the physical environment and enables it to evoke particular kinds of belonging. In this vein, Alexandra Walsham (2012), in her recent study of Early Modern England, *The Reformation of the Landscape*, describes how the Christianisation of places was:

> superimposed on the surface of the British and Irish countryside, by 'rechristening' towns, villages and hamlets.[552]

The word 'superimposed' jars a little, as it suggests that there existed, somehow, an authentic substratum of place, immune to the social processes Walsham so effectively explores. The Christianisation of place, was only one – albeit highly significant – layer in this topographical formation, no more or less socially constructed than the pre-Christian landscapes that preceded it.[553] However, Walsham's central thesis is that, whilst it transformed the medieval 'hallowed landscape', the Reformation in fact served to regenerate it in altered form, reviewing its educative purpose as a means of discerning divine handiwork, such

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context for beliefs extending far beyond the precincts of the church and graveyard'. *Inhabiting the Landscape*, p.20.

[551] *Ibid.,* p.189.

[552] Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape* (Oxford, OUP, 2012), p.47.

[553] Nicola Whyte affirms that landscape operates as a continual palimpsest of successive worldviews: *Inhabiting the Landscape*, p.8.

that the landscape became 'God's great book in folio'.[554] The point is well made and, within this paradigm, the parish continued both to reflect and shape the landscape, physical and imagined, especially as mediated through the church building itself. This powerful groundedness, so evident in the data collected for the case study accompanying this thesis, means that a parish church and its environs - ancient or not - tends to occupy a unique place within what John Lowerson (1992) calls 'the mystical geography of the English'.[555] In the extensive literature about its place in the landscape it is common to find the church building, especially in its 'country' setting, portrayed as an almost organic thing, a 'natural' feature of the landscape, as if it were an extrusion or extension of the terrain. As rural writer Fraser Harrison expresses it:

> The church moves me too ... because it unifies the village and its landscape in a single, reciprocal creation.[556]

Partly, as has been suggested, this derives purely from the age of many church buildings – 'the earth has a way of absorbing things that are placed on it ... and throwing over them something of her antiquity', as Richard Jeffries put it.[557] Also, it arises from the parish church's function as a repository of communal memory, made sacred in the building's transcendent space. This is Arthur Mee, describing the village church in 'The Enchanted Land' (1936):

> Always it has been at the heart of things, the village treasure house … It is of the spirit of the hills about or the green meadows in which it rises naturally, as though

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[554] *Ibid.,* p.393. Beaver affirms the ongoing effect of parishes on topography after the Reformation, describing how, in the Vale of Gloucester, 'language, ritual and cultural distinctions imposed an order on the landscape itself'. *Parish Communities in the Vale of Gloucester*, p44.
[555] John Lowerson in *The Rural Community*, c.8.
[556] Quoted in Lowerson*, Rural Community*, p.160. David Lowenthal has observed that, 'Like the archetypal sacred garden the English landscape is not natural but created, suffused with human as well as divine purpose', in 'British National Identity and the English Landscape', *Rural History* 2:2 (1991), p.215.
[557] Richard Jeffries, *Landscape with Figures: An Anthology of Richard Jeffries's Prose* (Harmondsworth, Penguin,1983), p.209.

> it has always been there. It is of the past and of the future and in the present it is ours.[558]

It would be easy to dismiss such misty sentiment, epitomising the sanctified patriotism of the interwar period, as a snug myth. It demands deconstruction, of course: *Why 'village'? How is it 'ours' - and who are 'we'? What if there are no 'green meadows'?* And so on. Nevertheless, if topography is continually being reproduced in the social imagination - if, as Massey claims, 'landscape is provisional; it changes and it could be otherwise'[559], then there are myriad ways in which the keynotes of territory and memory can be reconceived for other times and locations. The Church's failure to transfer these principals into the newly urbanized communities of nineteenth-century England is a matter of lively historical debate, though with a degree of consensus that the Anglican parish lost the initiative in cities to Nonconformist denominations, especially in the North, as the results of the 1851 census gave salutary evidence.[560] The geographical rootedness of the parish system, whilst the key to its resilience in an agrarian economy, at a time of rapid and complex social change was ponderous and, arguably too 'landed' (with all of the social and economic associations of that term) to respond effectively.[561] Coleman (1980), analysing this process and its regional differentiation, remarks:

> Only in a largely static society could a church slow to adapt and highly dependent on habit, convention and traditional forms of influence hope to survive unscathed.[562]

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[558] Arthur Mee, *Enchanted Land* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1951), p.54. David Matless considers in depth the era of Mee and Morton in *Landscape and Englishness* (London, Reaktion, 1998), c.2.
[559] Doreen Massey, *Landscape/Space/Politics: An Essay:* https://thefutureoflandscape.wordpress.com/landscapespacepolitics-an-essay/, accessed 17/6/15.
[560] Cf. Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, Part I; B.I.Coleman, *Church of England*, pp.38-9; Anthony Russell, *The Country Parish* (London, SPCK, 1986), p.11ff.
[561] Mingay observes that the agrarian depression of the late nineteenth century 'marked the end of parochial paternalism, the passing of traditional society...'. G.E.Mingay, *Rural Life in Victorian England* (London, Heinemann, 1977), p.51. The landed assets of the Church of England, which remain the material basis of its security, have recently come under scrutiny in The Centre for Theology and Community's report *Our Common Heritage*: http://www.theology-centre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/OCH-Final-Final.pdf, accessed 9/7/15.
[562] B.I.Coleman, *Church of England,* p.15.

Inescapably, both the concept of 'parish' and its built embodiment, the parish church, became – and arguably remain - deeply associated with an idea of the 'pastoral': the aesthetic tradition which drank deeply from classical imagery of an idealized topography. In its various forms, from sixteenth century renaissance poetry through to the paintings of Constable, pastoral infused the present landscape with symbolic visions of both past and future that were wittingly illusory, according to Lerner (1972), embodying the contrast between 'seeing nature as it is' and a 'mediated vision' shaped by human expectations, 'wishes, fears and hopes'.[563] As such, it was inherently nostalgic in tone: Bishop (1995) affirming that 'all nostalgia is pastoral', in the sense of being rooted in 'a sense of place and landscape, yearning and loss'. 'To encounter nostalgia', he writes:

> is always to enter a particular landscape ... in a specific mood: the pastoral.[564]

Like the churchyard in Gray's *Elegy* or Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, returning to the kirk at the end of his voyage (evoking the poet's own symbolic return to his childhood Rectory home[565]), the Anglican parish is deeply implicated in this myth of belonging to the land. This is, of course, exceedingly problematic: not only in perpetuating the fallacy that 'God made the country, man made the town'[566] but, as Williams (1985) powerfully argued, in that it can present an equally fallacious view of rural life, blind to the dynamics of power and poverty.[567] There is a dual irony to this, given the origins of the parochial idea in Graeco-Roman civic life and of Christianity as an 'urban cult'[568] and that, as P.J.Taylor notes, 'the pioneer of industrialization and the most urbanized country in the world is idealized in rural

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[563] Laurence Lerner, *The Uses of Nostalgia* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1972), p.18.
[564] Peter Bishop, *An Archetypal Constable: National Identity and the Geography of Nostalgia* (London, Athlone Press, 1995), p.57; Cf. Lerner, *Nostalgia*, p.41. Likewise, Fred Inglis writes: 'Faced with any landscape-painting, we look in it for a home which we can persuade ourselves we have always known'. In *Reading Landscape*, p.208. Writing of the palimpsest nature of urban landscapes, Patrick Keiller describes how 'we look in landscape for our own place of belonging', in *The View From the Train: Cities and Other Landscapes* (London, Verso, 2013), p.23ff.
[565] I am indebted to Dr Malcolm Guite for this insight.
[566] Cowper, cited in Coleman, *Idea of the City*, p.24.
[567] Cf. *Country & City*, chapters 3&8; Ronald Blythe notes persistent myth that 'real values' are to be found in a rural parish. In *Akenfield* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969), p.16.
[568] Pounds, *Parish*, p.113. Pounds notes that urban parishes came later than rural ones; cf. also Godfrey, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.311.

terms'.[569] However, as Harvey (1989) has considered, periods of intense 'space-time compression' – the phrase by which he describes the revolutionary socio-economic shifts of Modernity – inevitably produce an equal and opposite response that seeks images of rooted permanence as reassurance in unsettled times.[570] It is no coincidence, then, that pastoral nostalgia flourished (and flourishes) in such circumstances.[571]

The secret parish

> Always include the local nature within the membership of the local community[572]

The marked resilience of the parochial concept in both urban and rural areas reveals its natural associations to be remarkably fertile soil for place-formation. Although, at worst, these present the parochial as blinkered and hopeless escapism, at best they offer what, Sue Clifford (1996) argues, no other term in English can, as an equivalent to the German *heimat*, a way of describing 'the intersection of culture and nature' and 'deeply felt ties of familiarity, identification and belonging'.[573] Land gives parish its conceptual weight. Often it is secular, rather than ecclesiastical, scholarship that homes in on this essential truth: the writings of Robert MacFarlane being the most current expression.[574] In a fascinating introduction to Reverend Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selbourne*, Richard Mabey (1977) considers that 'parish' is the crucial idea behind White's unparalleled description of local ecology:

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[569] P.J.Taylor, quoted by David Storey, *Territory*, p.86.
[570] Harvey, *Postmodernity*, c.17. Affirmed by Lowenthal: 'in the face of massive change we cling to the remaining familiar vestiges'. *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, CUP, 1985), p.399.
[571] Cf. Lerner, *Nostalgia*, p.18: Lerner asserts that 'pastoral' sees the landscape in counterpoint – 'as the opposite to something else'.
[572] Wendell Berry, quoted in Vitek & Jackson, *Rooted in the Land*, p.81.
[573] Sue Clifford & Angela King (eds.), *From Place to PLACE* (London, Common Ground, 1996), pp.3-7.
[574] In a recent BBC interview, the nature writer Robert MacFarlane has spoken of the need for 'progressive parochialism' in environmentalism: http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b054pfn9, accessed 18/6/15.

> 'Parish' is a very laden concept. It has to do not just with geography and ecclesiastical administration, but with history and a system of loyalties. For most of us, it is the indefinable territory to which we feel we belong, which we have the measure of. Its boundaries are more the limits of our intimate allegiances than lines on a map. These allegiances have always embraced wild life as well as human...[575]

Mabey coins the term 'parochial ecology' to capture White's micro-level attention to Selborne – 'the landscape of the pastoral dream made flesh'[576], but there is no 'illusory' nostalgia to this affirmation: for Mabey, it became a guiding theme for his pioneering environmental work, as expressed in, for example, *Common Ground* (1980) and *Second Nature* (1984). As he writes in the former:

> The idea of parish ... must underlie ... a conservation policy which takes any account of human feelings.[577]

Highlighting another priest-naturalist, John Stevens Henslow, Rector of Hincham in Suffolk, Mabey argues that, for the man who taught Charles Darwin and encouraged his voyage on *The Beagle*:

> Yet it was in his parish that his most important work was done ... he was not just Hincham's rector but its *curator*.[578]

Leaving aside the unique (and, from a twenty-first century perspective, extraordinary) freedom of the single-parish incumbent in this era to attend to broader interests, the essence of Mabey's tribute to Henslow is profoundly significant. It is not his concern to explore the theological implications of being the 'curator' of a locality, nevertheless the resonances with the 'cure' of the parish priest are plain and it may be contended with some force that truly parochial

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[575] In Gilbert White & Richard Mabey (ed.), *The Natural History of Selbourne* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977), xvii.
[576] *Ibid*., xv, xi.
[577] Richard Mabey, *The Common Ground: A Place for Nature in Britain's Future?* (London, Hutchinson, 1980), p.36.
[578] Mabey, *Common Ground*, p.37 (my italics).

ministry is pastoral on both counts – formed by an ecology of care for a particular place, its people and their relation to the land.

One of the riches of the parochial tradition is thus what Oliver O'Donovan describes as the 'reciprocal relation between nature and culture ... mediating a possibility for human life in community'.[579] By virtue of its territorial stability, the parish is uniquely placed to offer such mediation: a fact that has long been recognised in the pioneering work of Common Ground, the environmental charity that Richard Mabey founded in 1982 with Sue Clifford and Angela King. This saw particular expression in the Parish Maps project, which, for ten years from 1986, encouraged local neighbourhoods to depict in imaginative ways the territory to which they especially identified.[580] Accepting the ways in which this scheme was 'tugged away from the city' by the inescapably rural overtones of the term 'parish', Crouch and Matless (1996) observed how it:

> connects settlement and surrounding land … to a long English cultural tradition of presenting place, especially rural place, in reverential, ritual, sacred terms.[581]

Whilst the imaginative affiliation of 'landscape' with rural, rather than urban topography became a conditioning factor on what was produced (and by whom), Common Ground chose the parochial concept, because, as Sue Clifford plainly acknowledges:

> The ecclesiastical parish has been the measure of English landscape since Anglo-Saxon times.[582]

Digging more deeply into the imaginative and affective connotations of 'landscape', however, the charity also offered 'parish' as their definition of English

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[579] O'Donovan, *Sense of Place*, p.47.
[580] Cf. David Crouch, 'A Critical review of Parish Maps' in Clifford & King, *place to PLACE*, p.53ff; Sue Clifford and Angela King, *England in Particular* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2006), 317-18.
[581] David Crouch and David Matless, *Refiguring Geography*: Parish Maps of Common Ground, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 21:1 (1996) pp.238-9. Hoskins, noting the ecological and antiquarian tradition of Anglican parsons, describes the parish as 'the smallest field' of English history, in *Local History in England*, pp.26-29.
[582] *From place to PLACE*, p.6.

particularity expressly because of its rich notes of *personal* association and attachment – the 'place of responses' as Mabey has it.[583] Parish thus becomes an imaginative bridge between 'real' space-time community and the less tangible, psychological responses that seek out a place of personal settlement and wellbeing. In *Second Nature* (1982) Fraser Harrison writes:

> At least it can be said that we are saner, more contented people when we have ... close familiarity with a small, *parish-sized* patch of countryside in which we can plant our experience.[584]

The 'belonging' resonances of the term, so overwhelming in the case study accompanying this research, are hard to underestimate - and are a theme which the nature writer Roger Deakin picks up, with reference to John Donne's poem 'the Good Morrow':

> A parish accommodates to the imagination because it is framed or contained ... by ancient boundaries, natural and supernatural.[585]

In a further assessment of Gilbert White's parochial ecology, David Elliston Allen (1978), without irony or any overt sense of Christian spirituality, described Selborne as 'that secret, private parish inside each one of us'[586]: a remarkable phrase. The idea of the parish as a secret place of belonging is so powerful a metaphor that, notwithstanding its need for cultural deconstruction (the 'each one of us' in Allen's statement presumably being only those to whom the word parish carries such emotional significance), it demands theological exposition - a task to which the concluding section of this chapter will be addressed. Because, in the English context, notions of belonging are so tethered to a idealized conception of the land – 'nowhere else is landscape so freighted as legacy' observes David

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583 Richard Mabey, *Gilbert White* (London, Profile, 2006), c2.
584 Fraser Harrison, in Richard Mabey (ed.), *Second Nature*, p.166 (my italics).
585 As in Donne's poem, Deakin writes, the parish 'makes one little room, an everywhere'. In Clifford & King, *place to PLACE,* p.27.
586 David Elliston Allen, *The Naturalist in Britain* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978), p.51. Also cited in Mabey (ed.), *History of Selborne,* xvii.

Lowenthal[587] - such an account must resurface the route between nostalgia, utopia and Christian eschatology, so that parochialism is prevented from becoming, on the one hand, a hopeless quest for unattainable place or, on the other, a stagnant cipher for lost homeland.

Reframing the pastoral

Nostalgia - 'history's third imprint' in David Lowenthal's fine phrase[588] - certainly appears as the constant, if unreliable, companion of parish studies. Perhaps this is because both nostalgic - and its correlate, utopian - ideas, are offspring of a shared Christian 'parent narrative'. As Tuan (1977) comments, tellingly:

> Most utopias can be placed somewhere between the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem ... the road connecting the two is history.[589]

The 'Utopian paradigm', according to Tuan, is 'the man-nature-God relation'[590] which, if so, makes the question of whether Eden or New Jerusalem can be 'reached' in space-time, an essentially theological one.[591] For W.H.Auden, these twin poles held powerful symbolic and ethical significance:

> Eden is a past world in which the contradictions of the present world have not yet arisen; New Jerusalem is a future world in which they have at last been resolved.[592]

Considering this potency in pastoral poetry, Lerner (1972), argues that, whilst both are 'ways of refusing history' because they are 'placed outside of ordinary

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[587] David Lowenthal, *British National Identity*, p.213.
[588] *English Landscape*, p.217.
[589] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p.199. W.H.Auden, by contrast, sees both as the 'refusal of history'
[590] Tuan, *Place*, p.216.
[591] A question which More leaves unresolved in *Utopia*, as Tuan affirms. *Place*, p.199.
[592] W.H.Auden, quoted in Lerner, *Nostalgia*, p.66. Elliston Allen tellingly describes Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selbourne* as 'the journal of Adam in paradise... the testament of static man', in *The Naturalist in Britain*, p.50.

time'[593], Eden and New Jerusalem have, nevertheless, substantial practical influence:

> The one structures our experience with sadness, the other with fierce hope. One speaks of an elegy, the other a call to action. In Christian mouths this call has often had a note of sharp paradox.[594]

These idealized conceptions of place are not confined to poetic reverie: as Mannheim (1960) advanced in *Ideology and Utopia*, they directly influence the politics and society at both national and local levels.[595] Cultural epistemology begins with an 'inherited situation', which is framed in ideology - the medieval worldview of heaven and hell, to take a pertinent example. Societies, Mannheim argues, naturally operate with reference to such transcendent ideas[596], ideology and utopia being the two principal forms in Western culture: the former being ideas that are integrated with the existing order, the latter being unattainable without a revolutionary overturning of the *status quo*. Mannheim cites the Christian notion of brotherly love as one such utopian idea: if society were *actually* to operate accordingly, he ventures, the social system would have to be completely 'broken up' and reformed.[597]

The parish, as with other ecclesiological forms, has as a singular place in this typology, in that it is both ideological - rooted in the existing order - *and* utopian, aspiring to an eternal, 'unreachable' form of community: that is, the Kingdom of Heaven. In Utopian thought, imagination is the bridge that links the idealised landscape (future and past) to the present, prompting particular kinds of action in the present according the nature of the place being imagined.[598] Central to this

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[593] Lerner, *Nostalgia*, p.72.
[594] Lerner, *Nostalgia*, p.65.
[595] A point reinforced by Richard Bauckham's perceptive analysis of the Revelation to St. John in relation to first century geopolitics. 'The New Jerusalem as Place' in *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge, CUP, 1993), p.132ff.
[596] Cf. Charles Taylor on 'Modern Social Imaginaries' in *A Secular Age* (London, Harvard University Press, 2007), c.4.
[597] Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London, Routledge, 1960), p.125ff.
[598] A.L.Morton has demonstrated how a peculiarly English vision of 'Utopia' has enabled a radical social critique at different stages of the nation's history: in *The English Utopia* (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1978).

potential is their utility as images of desire. In essence, this desire concerns the longing for home (the literal meaning of 'nostalgia'), whose emotional, spiritual force holds a unique capacity to influence human spatial practice, locally and globally.[599] In the loss of an explicitly Christian sense of eschatological belonging, French sociologist Danielle Hervieu-Leger (2000) argues that European culture has experienced a 'dislocation' which lacks the 'imaginative and social energy' necessary to realise a common utopian vision.[600] Nostalgia may thus be seen as the inevitable counterpart to Utopian thought; the equal and opposite magnetism that draws Western societies back to Eden or Arcadia.[601]

In an influential essay, Starobinski (1966) charts in detail the progress of nostalgia as a cultural phenomenon, from its coining as a neologism in 1688 to describe the physical and mental effects of homesickness experienced by soldiers fighting in the European Religious Wars to its replacement by the more recognisable affective form in use today - implying, pejoratively, 'useless yearning for a world or way of life from which one has been irrevocably severed'.[602] Yet Starobinki's thesis that the nostalgic 'return' no longer has any beneficial effect for civilized societies unattached to the 'village' ideal - 'it is not the uprooting which causes trouble', he claims[603] - now appears both dated and flawed. By contrast, Svetlana Boym (2001) contends that nostalgia is of profound significance in contemporary politics, being essentially a product of Modernity's 'universalising' tendency noted earlier. For Boym, therefore, nostalgia is both a product and producer of social space: a geographical phenomenon:

> What is crucial is that nostalgia was not merely an expression of local longing, but the result of a new understanding of time and space that made the division into 'local' and 'universal' possible. The nostalgic creature has internalized this division,

[599] This potential is discussed by Svetlana Boym in *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, Basic Books, 2001) c.1.
[600] Daniele Hervieu-Leger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (Cambridge, Polity, 2000), pp.90-92.
[601] According to Bishop, nostalgia posits two different times, a problematical present and a past that is the object of yearning. *An Archetypal Constable*, pp.56-7.
[602] Jean Starobinski, 'The Idea of Nostalgia', *Diogenes* 14:54 (June 1966), p.101.
[603] *Ibid.,* p.103.

> but instead of aspiring for the universal and the progressive he looks backwards and yearns for the particular.[604]

By virtue of its ancient associations with what might be called 'homely landscape' the parish may be seen as peculiarly prone to nostalgic depiction. It is, we have noted, pastoral in both senses of the word – natural and nurturing.[605] Nevertheless, it does not quite equate to either of the two types of nostalgia Boym proceeds to put forward – what she terms 'restorative' and 'reflective':

> Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time.[606]

Whilst taking forward with great élan its contemporary understanding and impact, the impression created by Boym is still of nostalgia as an effect, a *by-product* of Modernity, which does not quite escape the 'useless' connotations ascribed to it by Starobinski. The assumed narrative of nostalgia is that its redundancy – and therefore its ripeness for parody and dismissal – arises from the impossibility of return. Because it attempts to recreate a fictional past, nostalgia is deliberately ignorant of the present: a 'refusal' of history. It is contended that, in its contemporary form, the yearning for parochial belonging – for abiding in a bounded community – manifests itself far more positively, as a highly significant component in place-formation. Contemporary parochial nostalgia is not concerned so much with the - clearly impossible - *restoration* of an imagined former place, but selects elements of the idealised 'nostalgic' home (one of which is a sense of 'parish') to integrate with the present, in much the same way that enthusiasts for 'vintage' lifestyle renew and adapt earlier forms and designs. 'Vintage', one might say, does not 'actually' wish to live in, for example, the 1950s, or simply to reflect upon it, but rather desires to employ aspects of a certain period or place in the contemporary situation, performing

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[604] *Future of Nostalgia*, p.11.
[605] Madeleine Bunting identifies the interwoven symbolism of sheep as metaphor for rural settlement and Christian care in *The Plot: A Biography of My Father's English Acre* (London, Granta, 2009) , p.74. Cf. also Williams, *Country and City*, p.22.
[606] *Ibid*., p.41.

what Akiko Busch describes as 'the graceful coexistence of technology and nostalgia'.[607]

There is, in sum, rather less 'yearning' and far more 'aspiring' involved in postmodern nostalgia, indicating a demonstrably positive utilisation of the past. What might be termed *generative nostalgia* is thus deeply consumerised and creative, and clearly extends beyond lifestyle to operate as an engine for social aspiration and the creation of home. Empirical evidence from the accompanying case study indicates that, in some communities, the parish church is a central imaginative component that continues to generate new versions of locality: thus reproducing and redefining 'what parish is' in the present.[608]

Nostalgia may yet be a symptom of spiritual or social sickness, but its 'refusal of history' is by no means without purpose. Indeed, as demonstrated above, such imaginative geographies (past and future-orientated) have successively proved to be engines of resistance to versions of the present 'problematic' place. This is by no means to say that the parish is not prey to the dysfunctional type of nostalgia often hovering over the political debate about 'Englishness' and social inclusion. It is, without question, associated with an eschatology of doom that, in its most hopeless form, evokes the bleak sentiments uttered by Hoskins (1955) at the close of his otherwise brilliant work:

> Barbaric England of the scientists, the military men and the politicians: let us turn away and contemplate the past before all is lost to the vandals.[609]

As Tuan (1977) asserted, the danger of 'geopiety' (his term for the spiritual attachment to place) is a 'passion for preservation'[610] - a movement into which the parochial is all too easily conscripted and thereby fossilised. The resultant worship of 'heritage'[611] can find the parish church uneasily presented as, in effect,

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[607] Busch, *Geography of Home*, p.26.
[608] Cf. David Lowenthal's concept of 'creative anachronism' in *The Past,* c.7.
[609] In *English Landscape*, p.291. This astonishing statement is examined in Matless: *Landscape and Englishness*, p.276ff.
[610] Tuan, *Space and Place*, p.197.
[611] Of which Patrick Wright's *On Living in An Old Country* is still the most devastating critique.

a redoubt against invasion: a contemporary, politicized version of its (deliberately nostalgic) depiction in Cavalcanti's wartime propaganda film *Went the Day Well?* Such cornered parochialism is arguably the consequence both of an inadequately dynamic understanding of space - whereby 'land' and 'place' are conceived statically, with time as the dynamic force threatening to bear it away - and, insofar as the Anglican church is responsible, the failure to connect Christology to locality, with the result that the parish is inadequately defended against such notions.

The real danger is that scholarly debate becomes unhelpfully bipolar, such that 'English' attachment to territory falls victim to easy caricature as reactionary, exclusive and politically right-wing, whilst liberal geographical discourse, in its bid to demonstrate that spatial structures are dynamic, unbounded and easily deconstructed can appear detached and curiously *placeless*.[612] Massey (2005) tacitly acknowledges this dilemma, confessing her own susceptibility to strong sentiments of local attachment whilst simultaneously recognizing their fleeting, ungraspable nature. As she concludes:

> Neither a concept of the local as 'only local' nor a romanticisation of the local as bounded authenticity ... offers much hope for a wider politics.[613]

Land's end

The church's answer, it is suggested, is not to dispense with the territorial principle for being locked into anachronistic perceptions of space: a Modernistic response all too redolent of Starobinski's 'civilised' denial of the need for roots, but to find the means whereby heritage becomes a key to unlock, not barricade,

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[612] Patrick Wright's writings epitomise this tension, especially: *The Village That Died for England: The Strange Story of Tyneham* (London, Vintage, 1995) and his essay, 'Last Orders for the English Aborigine': http://www.patrickwright.net/2005/04/09/last-orders/, accessed 16/6/15.
[613] *For Space*, p.182.

the future.[614] This cannot be realised without prosecuting a genuinely evangelical appreciation of place that relocates nostalgia in a Christian eschatology of belonging[615] - a task sublimely evoked by Simone Weil:

> Every human being has at his roots here below a certain terrestrial poetry, a reflection of the heavenly glory, the link, of which he is more or less vaguely conscious, with his universal country.[616]

Given that, as T.S.Eliot (1939) put it, 'a wrong attitude towards nature implies, somewhere, a wrong attitude towards God'[617], the redemption of Weil's 'terrestrial poetry' is likewise an essentially theological quest. Bonhoeffer's versatile concept of Christ as the 'centre' – both of human community and between God and nature – was found to be particularly helpful in describing the orientation of parochial theology, in which the world 'unwittingly', in Barth's term (the equivalent of Weil's 'vague awareness'), participates. In this scheme, the church's role is to articulate and relocate that 'longing for home' of which the world is tacitly aware. As such, writes Bonhoeffer:

> The space of the church is not there to try to deprive the world of a piece of its territory, but precisely in order to prove to the world that it is still the world ... which is loved by God and reconciled to him.[618]

The reconciliation of the earthly and heavenly places at the cross, is, as T.F.Torrance (1976) explains, revealed in the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, which confirm the new trajectory of human place towards its end in

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[614] With regard to history in general, David Lowenthal writes, ' We require a heritage with which we continually interact.... (where) past is continually resurrected into an ever-changing present'. *The Past*, pp.410-12.
[615] For the centrality of the eschatological horizon in place-theology cf. Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, pp.139-143; also Hjalstrom, *No Home Like Place*, c.3
[616] Weil *Waiting on God* (London Fontana, 1950), p.134.
[617] T.S.Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London, Faber & Faber, 1939), p.62. Cf. also William Temple, *Nature Man & God* (London, Macmillan, 1949), p.473ff.
[618] *Ethics,* p.202.

him.[619] The bestowal upon the church of the Holy Spirit subsequently confirms the local vocation of the church, such that:

> The church on earth, in the continuing space-time of this world, is the place where God and man are appointed to meet.[620]

Christian eschatology, therefore, both expresses and resolves the impossibility, humanly speaking, either of returning to Eden or reaching the New Jerusalem. 'In this eschatological reserve and deep teleological ambiguity', Torrance writes, 'the church lives and works'.[621] The point to impress here is that this dynamic eschatological 'situation' is geographical as much as historical – moreover that space as well as time is radically 'open' to the Holy Spirit's anticipation of heaven. The vocation of the Anglican parish is thus to give spatio-temporal expression to the 'new place' in the midst of the old - which, crucially, involves the demotion of past and present places from their claim to ultimacy, which is the root of terrestrial idolatry.

Bonhoeffer's categories of 'ultimate' and 'penultimate', outlined in his *Ethics*, are extremely helpful in articulating this Christology of place. Pivotal here is Christ's 'taking our place' at the cross – which was, in Bonhoeffer's words, 'at the same time the judgement on the ways and things before the last'. Whilst this echoes the Barthian 'no' to natural revelation and may appear as the opposite of Weil's confession of humanity's innate 'terrestrial poetry', one has to question whether it is not simply the negative form of which the other is the positive affirmation – in other words, the yearning cry for the soul's 'secret parish' only finds its answering, homecoming call in Christ, God made place for us.[622]

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[619] Torrance stresses that it is the *eschatos* not the *eschaton* that is primary: not the end of all things, but the end of all things *in Christ*. *Resurrection*, p.151.
[620] *Ibid.,* p.129.
[621] *Ibid.,* p.156.
[622] Thus Temple: 'The distinction between Natural and Revealed Religion is...concerned...solely with determining the method of examination'. *Nature, Man & God*, p.7. Cf. also Robert J.Palma, *Karl Bath's Theology of Culture: The Freedom of Culture for the Praise of God* (Pennsylvania, Pickwick Publications, 1983).

For Bonhoeffer, the revelation of the present place's penultimacy typically produces two responses in Christian theology: one based solely on the cross, emphasising the ultimate's active judgement of the penultimate (expressed in its most extreme form in the view that 'the world is ripe for burning'), or the other, based solely on the incarnation – a 'compromise' with the world that sees the ultimate as 'totally on the far side of the everyday', the effective sustenance of the *status quo*. Both of these positions, argues Bonhoeffer, are 'a refusal of faith in the creation' and 'only in the unity is the conflict resolved'.[623] When incarnation and atonement are taken in one movement, there is 'neither a destruction nor a sanctioning of the penultimate'[624] – a vital insight for parochial theology, which is to say that the present place ('parish' in this context) gains its particular glory and purpose in relation to the ultimate place, that breaks in to history and geography in the person of Christ and draws the world forward by the work of the Holy Spirit to its consummation in the 'new parish', which is the kingdom of heaven. This 'heavenly priority', in Bonhoeffer's view, enables the perception of *the natural* – 'the form of life preserved by God for the fallen world and directed towards ... renewal through Christ':

> Through the Fall the 'creature' becomes 'nature'. The direct dependence of the creature on God is replaced by the relative freedom of natural life ... for God and one's neighbour. [625]

This 'relative freedom', as always in Bonhoeffer's theology, is freedom *for* – the limited and partial freedom *for* God and neighbour, in contrast to 'absolute freedom' in Christ. 'Natural life must not be understood simply as a preliminary to life with Christ', he stresses:

> It is only from Christ Himself that it receives its validation. Christ Himself entered into the natural life, and it is only through the incarnation of Christ that the natural life becomes the penultimate which is directed towards the ultimate.[626]

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[623] *Ethics,* p.131.
[624] *Ibid.,* p.133.
[625] *Ibid.,* p.145.
[626] *Ibid.,* p.145.

Transferring this dynamic, the parish, as a local ecology, becomes *free* to the extent that it is in Christ, through whom the parochial vocation to natural life is realised. There is clearly an unresolved tension here between the world's *de facto* reconciliation to God – the sense that it is already 'in Christ' through his saving work – and its evident continuing fallenness. As was noted in Chapter Two, a lively apprehension of the work of the Holy Spirit is required in order to *ground* this, so that the eschatological home - unlike Utopia - may truly be anticipated in the present locale. Nevertheless, his ordering of 'ultimate' and 'penultimate' gives liberating perspective to the parochial vocation, according with C.S.Lewis' briefer (although broader in scope) reflection in his essay 'First and Second Things', written in 1942. With a similar 'penultimate' perspective on Nazism, Lewis writes:

> Every preference of a small good to a great and partial good involves the loss of the small and partial good for which the sacrifice was made.[627]

Only by relegating 'second things' to their appropriate place in the light of 'first things', he continues, can the former retain their glory and true situation – noting the paradox that:

> You can't get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first.[628]

This automatically begs the question (Lewis concludes) as to 'which things come first?' although the inference is clear when applied to place-theology: the only escape from the fatal desire to possess the land, as the Biblical narrative attests, is to relinquish it, to 'give up one's place' for God and neighbour in order to receive it afresh in the Kingdom. This is an essentially *proleptic* calling, which offers both the redemption of nostalgia and release from the idolatry of territory to which

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[627] C.S.Lewis, *First and Second Things* (London, Fount, 1985), p.22.
[628] *Ibid.*, p.22. In this spirit, Madeleine Bunting writes: 'belonging (to the land) is first of all about commitment rather than possession'. *The Plot*, p.275.

the parochial tradition is chronically prone.[629] Whilst it does not satiate the nostalgic 'longing for home' - indeed, *separation* is the inevitable corollary of our eschatological position – it does settle and solve this in the conviction that where we belong, finally, is in Christ.[630]

Conclusion: 'A handful of earth'

> I went out into the churchyard where the green stones nodded together, and I took up a handful of earth and felt it crumble and run through my fingers. 'Well', smiled the vicar, as he walked towards me between the yew trees, 'that, I am afraid, is all we have'. 'You have England', I said.[631]

This, the closing sentence from H.V.Morton's extraordinarily popular interwar travelogue *In Search of England*, captures perfectly the tensions, connections and contradictions at the heart of the word 'parish': its evocation, like no other term in English, of the spiritual bond between nation and nature, as well as its susceptibility – by virtue of antiquity and sheer imaginative potentiality - to detachment from reality. From the Anglo-Saxon stone crosses that, in many cases, predated the building of a local church[632], the Anglican parish has had a stake in the soil. Part of the cost of its stakehold in English life has, however, been a weakened Christological vision of the land that arguably continues to the present day in the theologically-denuded debate concerning the future of the parish system. By way of redress, this final chapter has described five aspects of its 'natural' vocation:

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[629] John Godfrey concludes that 'the *paroikia* is...an idea which presupposes a community of care and interest...looking forward as sojourners to the perfect society and worship of heaven'. In *The English Parish*, p.82.
[630] Cf. Frederick Buechner, *The Longing for Home* (New York, HarperCollins, 1996), p.2. Augustine writes, 'only in you do I find a gathering–place for my scattered parts', in *Confessions* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1961), p.249; also, *City of God*, p.429 on 'longing' to become citizens of heaven.
[631] H.V.Morton, *In Search of England* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1960), p.277.
[632] Sam Turner describes this process in *Making a Christian Landscape*, c.1.

- The link, established very early on, between parish and 'soil', through both the former's alliance with the ownership and tenure of land - and the accompanying 'Christianisation' of the landscape.
- The indisputable place, secondly, of the parish (especially the parish church) in imagined landscapes of England, creating a powerful and often problematic association with pastoral belonging.
- Because of the above, that 'parish' has come to denote an ecology of care bonding human society to the local, natural environment.
- Fourthly, that the 'longing to belong' often associated with parochialism is both a central motive in place-formation and, it is argued, a symptom of spiritual 'homelessness'.
- Lastly, that, so far as the Church is concerned, the above must be located within a Christian eschatology of belonging: not in order to divert attention away from the land, but in order that present 'place' is freed from its claim to ultimacy.

The constant challenge is that 'parish' is such a wayward metaphor – infinitely suggestible and prone to the kind of idealism that all too easily clouds a realistic assessment of its worth. Nevertheless, that same quality can also give the cue to the soul of the parochial idea: the search for an earthly approximation of the heavenly home. So, perhaps the answer is to have a proper confidence in the English parish: after all, to be confident in the local is to be confident in the validity of human experience of place in God's purposes. Following his bold claim that 'all great civilisations are parochial', Patrick Kavanagh offers this more cautionary advice - pertinent for all those who are keen to see its renewal:

> Advising people not be ashamed of having the courage of their remote parish, is not free from many dangers. There is always that element of bravado which takes pleasure in the notion that the potato-patch is the ultimate. To be parochial (one) needs the right kind of sensitive courage and the right kind of sensitive humility.[633]

[633] Kavanagh, *Parish,* p.237.

Conclusion: A kind of belonging

Some years ago, Simon Jenkins in the *Evening Standard* paid tribute to parish priest and theologian Kenneth Leech on spending forty years in ministry in the East End of London. His column included the following observation:

> The doctors, teachers, social workers and police who work here commute from more salubrious parts. But the priests stay. They stay even when their flock is 70 percent Muslim. *They seem wedded to sheer geography*.[634]

It was an arresting comment and one which proved to be an inspiration for this piece of research: are parish priests wedded to 'sheer geography' – and, if so, why and to what theological end? Analysing the call to such geographical ministry in Anglican parochial form has yielded several conclusions, which it may be helpful now to summarise:

1) Parish – like all descriptions of place – is formed in the creative interplay of ontology, revelation, tradition and vocation. The reality or 'being' of place is first apprehended before it is filtered and conditioned according to cultural tradition, then 'acted out' in practice: each successive action reproducing and recreating the place first perceived.

2) Christology is at the heart of parochial praxis, 'wittingly' or otherwise. Developing and applying the doctrinal theme that describes Christ 'taking our place' in redeeming action, is offered as one way of describing Christian salvation is explicitly local terms.

3) Contemporary human geography provides indispensible tools for understanding the nature of 'parish', emphasising the inherent dynamism and openness of space to social, ethical production. In this light, the parish

[634] Simon Jenkins in the London *Evening Standard*, 8.10.98. (my italics).

emerges as a form of spatial ethic, grounded in the practice of neighbourhood.

4) The resulting 'vocation' of the parish has, in history and practice, had three intersecting dimensions: the first being *national*, such that parochial identity has ever been understood in perichoretic relation with the national, creating a unique compound of sacred and secular society.

5) This call to 'common ground' presents the parish as the enduring archetype of English neighbourhood, whose territorial boundaries underwrite its vocation to human settlement and place-formation.

6) The Anglican parish is inseparable from the natural landscape, in both imagination and practice. Being thereby prone to pastoral nostalgia and idolatry, this connection must equally be rooted in a Christian eschatology that points to 'land's end'.

The parish has thus proved to be the primary embodiment of Anglican social space, whose local vocation is defined by these essential principles. It is a commonplace to observe that, in the contemporary scene, parish 'works' better in some communities than in others. History suggests that it always did and, in 'self-contained' settlements like Oxted and Tandridge (the context for the case study that follows), the overwhelming evidence is certainly that it continues to play a vital function. In other settings, both rural and urban, there is mounting pressure to reconceive parochial organisation: a process that requires the imaginative reapplication of its threefold vocation. The parish is not, of course, the only communal form in the Church of England: other forms of ministry and mission (diocesan, religious, educational, for example) are likewise 'producers' of space, but to be *parochial,* it is contended, must include all three parts of this taxonomy: it must be *national* – informed by an idea of England that integrates sacred and secular life, contributing towards the formation of civil society; it must create *neighbourhood* by committed spatial practice in particular places - and it must be

natural in recognising the essential unity of human and physical geography: their common ground and destiny in Christ.

Whilst it has not been the purpose of this thesis to address the varied and extremely pressing questions now faced by the parish system, this study marks an 'Ebenezer stone' that clearly anticipates such an engagement. It will be worthwhile, therefore, in this concluding section, to view the terrain ahead from the standpoint reached. From this perspective, three principal challenges present themselves, of which the most acute is perhaps the viability of the parish system and its extraordinary legacy of built heritage, in terms of the Church's deployment of resources, ministerial and financial. Increasingly, the conversation surrounding the future of the parish homes in on the sheer material unsustainability of this burden.[635] In such a climate, it is vital that strategic decision-making by Dioceses and the Church Commissioners is not only theologically, but also *geographically* literate in the particular terms outlined above.[636] The nature and maintenance of its boundaries – what 'good fences' might look like - has, in particular, been a perennial challenge for the parish system, especially at times of rapid social change. At each such stage, it has adapted in order to survive and there is now again a pressing need to review their spatial function, especially in areas where, to paraphrase the Psalmist, the boundary lines have not fallen in pleasant places.[637]

The second, related challenge concerns the movement within the church to accommodate new types of local ministry that (it is often argued) offer a more contemporary response to the missionary challenges faced by the Church of England. 'Fresh Expressions' and 'Mission-Shaped Church' initiatives over the last twenty years have led to the now familiar espousal of a 'mixed economy' that

[635] Highlighted in the recent (October 2014) Westminster Faith Debates series, 'The Future of the Church of England': http://faithdebates.org.uk/category/debates/2014-debates/oxford-faith-debates-the-future-of-the-church-of-england/, accessed 16/6/15.
[636] The Church of England's recent electoral 'manifesto' was a refreshing shift in this direction, placing neighbourhood and belonging at the heart of the Anglican vocation. *Who Is My Neighbour?* (London, CHP, 2015).
[637] The development of the deanery is, as John Tiller proposed over thirty years ago, the key to such reconfiguration. *A Strategy for the Church's Ministry* (London, CIO, 1983), pp.76-78.

allows both for parochial and more 'pioneer' forms of ministry.[638] Whilst seeking to redress the unhelpfully adversarial tone of this debate, the 'mixed economy' can, at the local level, appear as mere passive accommodation and demands positive, visionary analysis in spatial terms.

If social space is, like skin, constantly renewing itself and if the spatial practice of the Christian community is so theologically rich, it is essential that the church's spatial praxis is intelligible to the contemporary situation - to wherever 'this place' happens to be. Addressing this theme, John Reader (2008) employs Ulrich Beck's term 'zombie categories' to denote those practices which are still enacted by the church, but which have long since ceased to 'live' for wider society. In particular, he pinpoints the danger of the church maintaining a nostalgic - essentially rooted and stable - view of space and place that no longer pertains.[639] Writing of the 'new theological space' with Chris Baker (2009), Reader recognises the 'increasingly blurred and overlapping religious and faith-based spaces' in a variegated and pluralistic society, citing as an example the controversies over the introduction of Sharia law in England.[640] Such tension between secularism and competing religious cultures, between the global and the local, behoves the church, they venture, to embrace a far more fluid conception of place than it has hitherto displayed.

Whilst a welcome injection of geographical thinking, there is a danger that Reader's argument suffers by seeing the church's vocation as culture-driven, rather than seeing culture - all culture - primarily as 'vocation-driven'. Having accepted that spatial praxis is not ethically or theologically neutral, it must follow that some forms of locality will be more authentically 'Christian' (or indeed 'Anglican') than others. For this reason, practical theologians need not be quick to dismiss certain traditional conceptions of place as 'zombie categories'. In the environmental debate, to cite one major example, the phronesis of the past is proving to be crucial in re-imagining the landscape, as shown by the Transition Town movement, where local resilience to future environmental shock takes its

[638] Cf. *Mission-Shaped Church*, p.xi.
[639] John Reader *Reconstructing Practical Theology* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008), c.2.
[640] Reader & Baker, *New Theological Space*, pp.7-8.

cue from former practices such as market gardening.[641] In a culture dominated by what John Reader calls the 'polygamy of space'[642], the most radical praxis may well be found in what might be termed 'local monogamy' and the ecological values of 'slowing down and staying put'.[643]

Mobility is, as Sigurd Bergmann (2008) has attested, a political, religious and economic issue[644] and local faithfulness – being 'wedded to sheer geography' - can be especially counter-cultural in the many contexts where it is the poor who are far less mobile than the rich: an essential insight of social and geographical theory in the last fifty years.[645] It is vital that, in pursuing a new vision for local ministry, the easy caricature of the parish as somehow spatially 'static', whilst more networked arrangements are, by definition, 'fluid' and 'dynamic' is, to put it bluntly, geographically unsustainable. That *all* forms of place are (and always were) characterised by flow and interrelation is perhaps the prime contribution of current spatial theory and this must be understood and applied in order to reinvigorate the territorial principle.

This is required, to address the third contemporary challenge to the parish system, because of what might be called the 'end of entitlement' for the Church of England within an increasingly secularised and multicultural nation, despite the acknowledged inadequacy of both of these – by no means equable – terms.[646] Whatever evolving form the Church's established status takes, there may be little doubt that the long recession of its worldly power is likely to continue, which may provide the opportunity for the parish system to develop a more radical local praxis in a period of accelerating devolution and localism. Certainly, when

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[641] Cf. Rob Hopkins, *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience* (Tones, Green Books, 2008). In urban South London, for example, the parish church has played a pioneering role in forwarding this movement, as projects in Brixton and Crystal Palace bear witness. http://www.crystalpalacetransition.org.uk, accessed 17/6/15.
[642] *Reconstructing Practical Theology*, p.11.
[643] Willem Vitek in *Rooted in the Land*, p.1. According to the Church's recent electoral statement, 'people are not so much divorced from place as seeking a place where they can most be at home'. *Who is My Neighbour?* p.22.
[644] Cf. Sigurd Bergmann, Thomas Hoff and Tore Sager, *Spaces of Mobility: The Planning, Ethics, Engineering and Religion of Human Motion* (London, Equinox, 2008), c.1.
[645] Doreen Massey notes the 'cartography of power' behind current patterns of global migration and mobility. In *For Space*, p.85.
[646] Cf. Taylor, *Secular Age*, p.14ff.

ecological and political debate increasingly homes in on less centralised, more communitarian solutions[647], any moves towards dismantling the parish system would appear fatally shortsighted. As the 'New Parish' movement among protestant churches in the United States clearly indicates, parochial practice has such radical potential in the current climate that, if it did not exist, one would have to invent it.[648]

A humbler role for the parish must surely find the seeds of its renewal within the origins of the term in Graeco-Roman civil government: the community beyond the boundaries, the *paroikia*. That the church employed and adapted a phrase essentially denoting those who *do not* belong to describe a new kind of community is as enticing a piece of historical and ecclesiological paradox as one is likely to encounter - and one brimming with potential for imaginative reinterpretation. With a fair degree of historical authority, as Percy (2006) affirms, the parish may be described as a fellowship of strangers, the community of 'non-belongers'.[649] The fact that scriptural usage of *paroikos* and its derivations is invariably translated as 'stranger' rather than 'parishioner' has kept this exegetical jewel surprisingly well-hidden.

Perhaps the most intriguing employment of the word[650] appears in Luke's Gospel, during his account of the Walk to Emmaus. In that mysterious resurrection encounter, Christ, incognito, draws alongside the two disciples on the evening of Easter Day and asks to hear the news – to which they retort, 'are you a stranger that you don't know what has happened here?' 'What things?' he persists – and they proceed to recount the events of his Passion. The Greek word used for 'stranger' here is *paroikeo* – from whose same root grows 'parish'; a more direct English translation might therefore be rendered, 'are you a *parishioner* that you

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647 Cf. 'In Praise of…Civil Parishes', editorial in *The Guardian*, 16th May 2011. http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/may/16/in-praise-of-civil-parishes, accessed 17/6/15.

648 Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens & Dwight J. Friesen, *The New Parish: How neighbourhood churches are transforming mission, discipleship and community* (Illinois, IVP, 2014).

649 In *The Future of the Parish,* p.4.

650 *Paroikos* occurs as a verb (*paroikeo*) in Luke 24.18 and Hebrew 11.9 and as a noun in Acts 7.6, 29 ('resident alien'); Eph 2.19 and 1 Peter 2.11. I am indebted to Dr Paula Gooder for these insights.

don't know what has happened here?' The image of Christ as parishioner, the alien and accidental neighbour, offers a key to the renewal of the parish as place of radical settlement and welcome.[651]

What kind of place is the Anglican parish? As a fusion of territory and tradition it represents, in closing, a kind of belonging – a school for belonging, even - whose rich theological significance the vagaries of time, place and politics do not diminish, but rather ground in truly incarnate form. The practice, not merely the principle, of neighbourhood is where its threefold vocation coheres and is most clearly displayed: and where idealised conceptions of English life are teased out in the constraining tangle of human affairs. This is not to say that parochial neighbourhood is immune from overly idealistic depiction[652]: rather, it is to conclude that localised practice is the test of all descriptions of place, translating and tethering them to the particular situation. If the Christian claim is that, as Jacob affirmed, God is in 'this place' – and, moreover, that the same God was in Christ reconciling that place to himself, then the Anglican parish, for all its archaism and compromise, may have proved the point.

[651] 'For the Christian, the refugee is always the test of place'. Timothy Gorringe at the *Faith and Place Network* Futures Symposium, University of Roehampton 30/6/15. Details at: http://faithandplacenetwork.org

[652] It may always have been so. Ian Archer's aforementioned research into Elizabethan London enjoyably describes how: 'parish records are soaked in the rhetoric of neighbourly unity... in doggerel of embarrassing awfulness.'[652]. *Pursuit of Stability*, p.84.

Appendix: Parish and Belonging in Oxted and Tandridge - an ethnographic case study

In their *apologia* for its role, Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank (2010) describe the parish as 'a springboard for mission and engagement with the deepest needs of our culture'. Its importance, they continue, lies:

> not just important in nurturing a sense of belonging, but for configuring a vision of humanity that embraces the local and the universal together, the whole cosmos human and non-human, the transcendent as well as the immanent.[653]

The challenge to such laudable claims is that they rest on a somewhat frail empirical foundation. The absence of any serious sociological analysis of the parish – a fact recognised by David Martin a generation ago[654] – persists into the present, with contemporary parochial studies extremely rare for this most basic component of English community life. Yet to qualify something as shadowy as a 'sense of belonging' is far from straightforward in an era when, as Eriksen (2010) affirms, individuals within a social structure inhabit many different 'levels of belonging' including kinship, professional networks and local and national allegiances.[655]

Added to this, the influence of the parish is so subtly interwoven into the fabric of English society that any attempt to perceive it risks the 'homeblindness' afflicting anthropologists within their native territory.[656] Indeed, the test for any empirical analysis of this kind of imagined community is to realise sentiments and perceptions that are often only implied and half-articulated. The central purpose of this case study has thus been to tie down what elusive concepts like 'parish' and 'belonging' actually mean in a specific local context. As such, it is necessarily partial in what it presents: one 'slice' through a specific pair of bounded communities.

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[653] In *For the Parish*, p.169.
[654] In Giles Ecclestone (ed.), *Parish Church?* p.44.
[655] Eriksen, *Small Places, Large Issues,* p.82ff.
[656] *Ibid.*, p.34.

Because of its fundamentally *interpretative* emphasis – what Denzin and Lincoln describe as 'a set of … material practices that make the world visible'[657] - it was therefore decided to employ a qualitative approach in the form of an ethnographic case study of the parishes of Oxted and Tandridge from my personal perspective as incoming Rector of that United Benefice.

The distinctive character of the case study, writes Catherine Hakim (2000), lies in its focus on a 'rounded picture' of a situation or community, rather than on in-depth analysis of individual experience. This emphasis on what she calls 'sociography' - 'the social mapping of the community's institutions, structures and patterns of relationship'[658] - combined with its acknowledged usefulness in highlighting the singularity or local particularity of the subject under investigation, indicated the usefulness here of a broadly ethnographic approach. In Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) classic definition, this involves:

> the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry.[659]

This immersion within and attention to a local culture is precisely what is afforded to a parish priest, and, as Mary Clark Moschella (2008) has explained, what makes ethnography peculiarly beneficial for understanding pastoral practice.[660] Ethnographic studies, in their emphasis on the researcher as

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[657] Denzin, Norman K. & Lincoln, Yvonna S., *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (London, SAGE, 2005), p.3. Martyn Denscombe writes how qualitative research is defined by 'a concern with meanings and the way people understand things'. In *The Good Research Guide* (Maidenhead, OUP, 2003) p.261. Similarly, Catherine Hakim describes its concern for 'looking at the way in which people respond to external social realities at the micro-level'. In *Research Design: Successful Designs for Social Economic Research* (London, Routledge, 2000) p.36.

[658] Hakim, *Research Design*, p.65.

[659] Martyn Hammersley & Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (London, Routledge, 2007) p.3.

[660] Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice* (Cleveland, Pilgrim Press, 2008), p.4. In a groundbreaking ethnographic study of his former parish, Kingswood in Bristol, Anglican priest and social anthropologist Timothy Jenkins describes how 'social space is made up of

'participant-observer', highlight this tension between 'insider' and 'outsider': one that is extremely familiar for ethnographers occupying the role of parish priest. The incumbency of a parish immediately places the priest at the centre of a neighbourhood, while at the same time keeping them at the 'boundary' by virtue of their peculiar vocation.[661]

Given that the ethnographic researcher is what David Ball calls 'the primary research instrument'[662], a high degree of reflexivity is required. For the priest investigating the parish this is acutely the case, being, as they are, both subject and object of their research: attracting and embodying the very data they seek. Because of this - and the recognition that both the incumbent's role and the potent local symbolism of the historic church buildings would inevitably influence the data obtained - it was decided at the outset not to ignore or negotiate around these indicators, but instead to use them as 'effective and visible signs' of the more elusive 'social space' of the ecclesiastical parish.[663]

The initial research question was framed thus: *What is the communal significance of the Anglican parish in Oxted and Tandridge?* However, the centrality of the word 'belonging' as a key descriptive term soon became apparent, not only owing to its recent prevalence in both the sociology of religion and social historical accounts of the parish[664], but its usefulness in drawing together the strands of communal identity and association yielded by the data. The principal source of this data was a series of focus groups, whose discussion centred on the appraisal of (primarily photographic) images of the two parish churches, St Mary, Oxted and St Peter, Tandridge. This was supplemented by a fieldwork journal, kept during the progress of the case study, which included a certain amount of archival research into the local history and topography of the parishes. The purpose of

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innumerable apprenticeships of signs' and so requires truly indigenous involvement in local culture in order to be understood. In *Religion in English Everyday Life,* p.215.

[661] As in Bonhoeffer's description of Christ, the priest often finds himself standing both in the centre and at the boundary of life. Bonhoeffer, *Center*, p.61.

[662] In Seale, *Society & Culture*, p.230. In research terms, my role here was that of both 'practitioner-researcher' and 'participant-observer'.

[663] Tate observes that, historically, the incumbent was 'the nucleus around which the whole parish system was to develop'. In *Parish Chest,* p.12.

[664] With regard to the former, especially Grace Davie's term 'believing without belonging' and the latter, Keith Snell's landmark historical study, *Parish and Belonging*, cited earlier.

journalling was quite specific: to record and reflect upon 'everyday' instances in my ministry that revealed the significance of 'parish' in this locale. Some of these notes have been written up below, in order both to amplify and contextualise the empirical data and also to convey a sense of the 'habitus' of parish life.[665]

The symbolism of the English parish church is, as Davison and Milbank (2010) aver, incredibly rich - 'without which our landscape, our cultural imagination and our faith is well nigh impossible to imagine'.[666] The sociologist David Martin refers to them as 'markers of space and time' and elegantly comments:

> Not only are they markers and anchors, but also the only repositories of all-embracing meanings pointing beyond the immediate to the ultimate. They are the only institutions that deal in tears and concern themselves with the breaking points of human existence. They provide frames and narratives and signs to live by, and offer persistence points of reference.[667]

As enduring symbols of community and continuity for local residents, the two church buildings were thus considered to be a potentially rich source of data, whilst the focus groups considering them had a strong degree of what Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) call 'cultural validity' as an appropriate method for the cultural form under investigation.[668] The practical separation of groups from Tandridge and Oxted parishes also introduced a useful element of triangulation into the research, whose comparative results were analysed in what follows.

As a practitioner-researcher, the study required sensitivity regarding the kinds of information that could be used. For those engaged in pastoral ministry this dual role can be further complicated by the dynamics of care, trust and power that the role of priest carries with it.[669] This underlined the need to be particularly conscious of how my involvement as parish priest not only determined the kind

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[665] Pierre Bourdieu's influential term for the lived space of everyday life – see Chapter Three above.
[666] Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, p.150.
[667] From an unpublished paper cited in Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945* (Oxford, Blackwells, 1994), p.189.
[668] In *Research Methods in Education* (London, Routledge, 2007) p.139.
[669] As Moschella notes, in *Pastoral Practice*, p. 86.

of data I gleaned, but also the *means* by which that data was elicited. My role was thus a 'pro' (in the sense that relevant data is readily accessible to me as priest) and a 'con' (in that it strongly influenced the manner in which people either 'opened up' to me, or not).

Discernment thus needed to be used at every stage of this study to ensure that my role as priest was explored positively in terms of its research potential and not to the pastoral detriment of those under my care. To some degree, the blurred boundaries apparent in pastoral ethnography are familiar territory for the priest, who inhabits an often-paradoxical role between public and private, professional and personal. Professional competence in such a landscape should not, however, obscure the subtle ethical implications of the project. Before analysing the progress and results of this study, it is necessary first to set the context by sketching the parishes under examination, the United Benefice of Oxted and Tandridge.

'In Acstede … there is a church': sketching the local context

Oxted is a small commuter town situated at the foot of the North Downs, on the borders of East Surrey and Kent. Now straddling a stretch of the M25, which cuts a deep swathe through the northern end of Oxted, the parish has hosted major East-West routes since prehistoric times, with the 'Pilgrims' Way' that shadows the motorway marking an ancient footpath running from Winchester to Canterbury.

Twenty minutes' drive from the outer reaches of South London, yet set in the Surrey Hills - 'the place where London ends and England can begin' in G.K.Chesterton's pregnant phrase[670] - and with several working farms in the neighbourhood, Oxted may best be described as what Anthony Russell (1986) has

[670] Being a line from Chesterton's poem *The Old Song*.

termed 'urban shadow countryside' [671], with most working residents commuting by train into London from the town's railway station. Like the many similar towns and villages that necklace the metropolis, Oxted is thus a 'threshold settlement' between urban and rural, which makes it simultaneously a place of retreat *from* and entry *into* London - an ambivalent state which is one of its defining social and demographic features.

Literally 'place of the oaks', the first historical references to Oxted appear in the Domesday Book, when it formed part of the manor of William the Conqueror's ally, Eustace of Boulogne. Significantly, the Domesday book also records that 'In Acstede (Oxted) … there is a church'[672], and the earliest parts of the present-day St Mary's date from this Norman period. The original settlement of Oxted (now known as 'Old Oxted') was mysteriously situated more than half a mile away from the parish church. However, with the arrival of the railway and the completion of the Oxted Tunnel in 1887, 'New Oxted' quickly grew up around St Mary's and the small agricultural parish of some 644 people in 1801 grew steadily to become the present-day town of some 10,000 residents.

For its size, Oxted has an extensive range of local facilities. Plenty of shops, a leisure centre, theatre, cinema and, surprisingly, the second largest secondary school in the country, make the town a significant community hub. Added to this, a strong sense of civic life and full social calendar - with large annual events such as the Oxted Carnival - give the town a striking sense of self-containment, as the *Daily Telegraph* observed in 2008.[673]

St Mary's Church, thought to stand on the site of a pre-Christian burial ground, is, accordingly to one of the few local histories of the town, 'an item of great value to the general view of Oxted'.[674]

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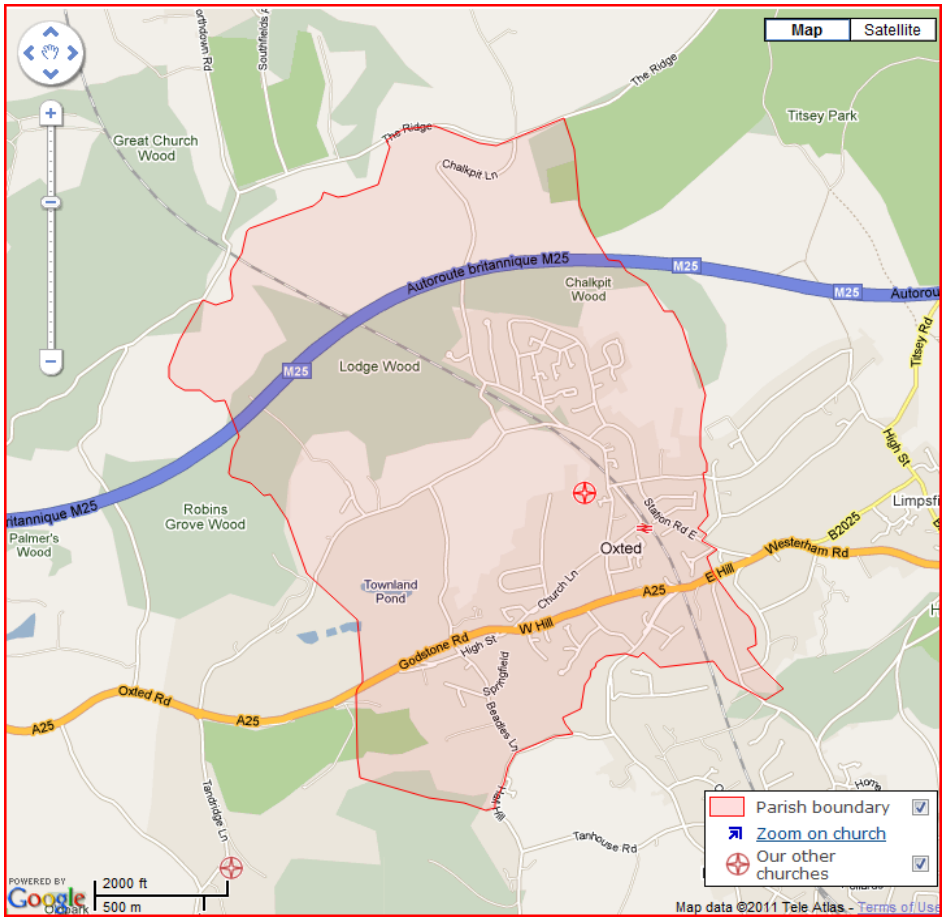
[671] Anthony Russell, *The Country Parish* (London SPCK, 1986), p.3; C.f. Leslie Francis, *Church Watch: Christianity in the Countryside* (London SPCK, 1996), c.13, who applies Russell's categories in his research.
[672] Cited in W.F.Mumford, *Pages from the past in Oxted, Limpsfield and Titsey* (Salt Lake City, Genealogical Society of Utah, 1965), p.13.
[673] *Britain's Richest Towns*, 18th April 2008, sourced on 25th July 2012.
[674] Lewis G. Fry, *Oxted, Limpsfield and Neighbourhood* (Oxted, W&G Godwin, 1932), p.87.



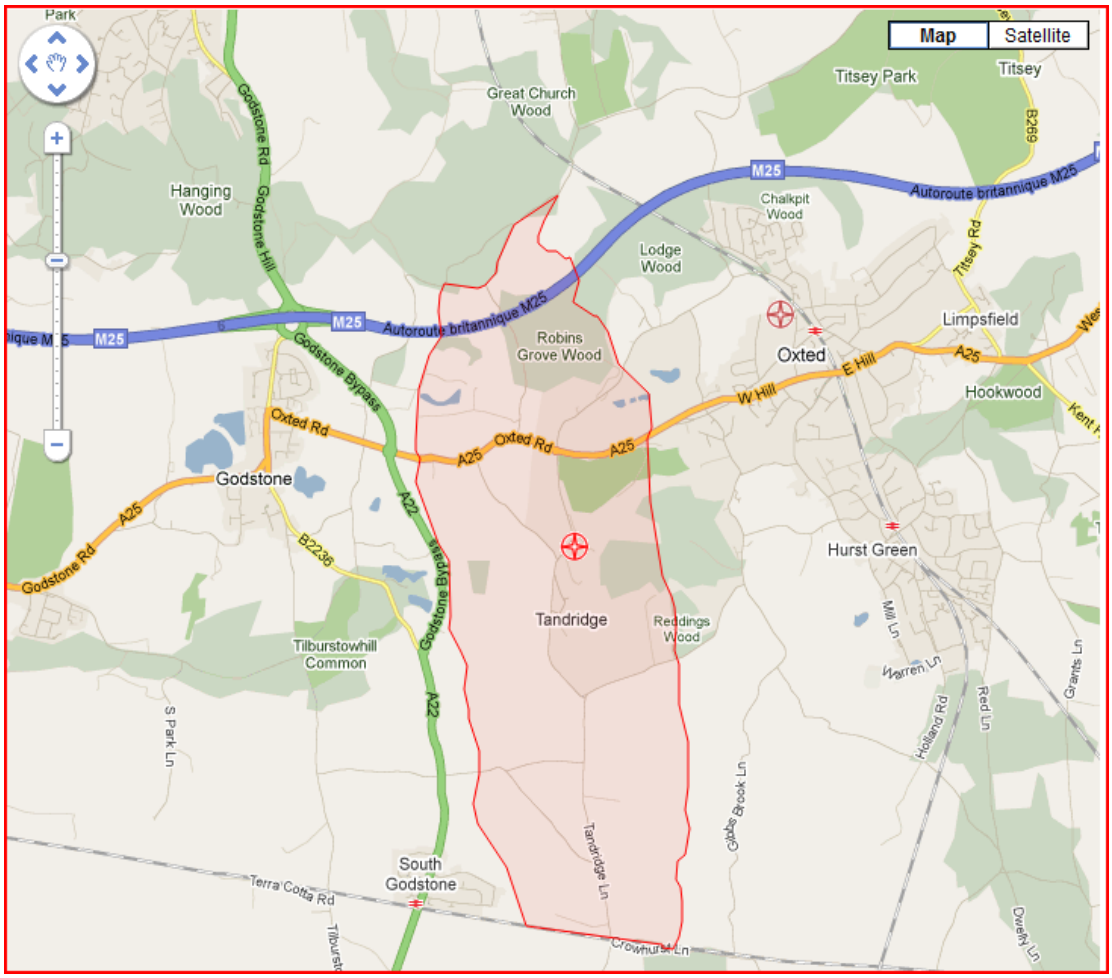
Oxted ecclesiastical parish boundaries (*source: Google maps*)

Its principal feature is a 'short and rugged' Norman tower of 'massive strength'[675], and the church walls not only tell the history of the building through the centuries (a distinct change of colour in the stonework half way up marking where the church was 'raised' in the fourteenth century) but also reflect the local landscape in the ironstones that pepper the exterior. Since 1964, St Mary's has been the parish church for the northern part of the town (the 'Oxted North' ward), the parish splitting when its original sister church, St John's Hurst Green ('Oxted South') became an independent parish. Both fall within Tandridge District - whose council offices are in Oxted – as does the ecclesiastical parish of St Peter's Tandridge, united with Oxted in 1998.

[675] Mervyn Blatch, Surrey Churches: Saxon-Georgian, *Surrey History* I ii, p.9.

Though by far the smaller settlement, being a hamlet of just 400 souls, the name of Tandridge was adopted for the new district council in 1973, having been one of the thirteen 'hundreds' into which the governance of Surrey had historically been divided. On the busy A25, to the north of the village, there stands a memorial on a small hillock known as 'Hundred's Knoll', at which gatherings of the area's first local government were held from Anglo-Saxon times until the eighteenth century.

Tandridge village lies two miles to the west of Oxted on a fold of land known as the Greensand Ridge. It forms the centre both of the ecclesiastical and civil parishes of Tandridge, the boundaries of the former being shown below:



Tandridge Ecclesiastical parish boundaries (source: Google maps)

The civil parish council (part of Tandridge District) has a long history, dating its first meeting to 1894, the year of the Parish Councils Act, which effectively separated administration of social welfare from the auspices of the parish church.[676]

Whilst many of the residents commute into London from Oxted or Hurst Green stations, the agricultural tradition of the village continues, with two working farms in the parish – and a strong sense of being 'closer to the country' than nearby Oxted. As with Oxted, Tandridge has a high degree of community cohesion and participation, and the parish church plays a central role in key events such as the Tandridge Village Fete and Christmas Show.

The parish church of St Peter the Apostle, which, like St Mary's, is Grade One listed, is situated at the northern end Tandridge Lane, the main road running through the village. Its oldest parts are, like St Mary's, thought to date from the eleventh century, though the present structure of the church dates from 1300, with a major reconstruction in 1874 by Sir George Gilbert Scott, who resided at nearby Streete Court. Within the churchyard – and flanking the building - stands the Tandridge Yew, one of the oldest trees in England and estimated by some to be between three and five thousand years old. The tree featured on a series of postage stamps to mark the Millennium and has considerable symbolic importance for the local community.

The deep roots of each parish church in the history of their communities are, then, a significant feature held in common by Oxted and Tandridge, extending into the present day through the presence in both of church schools (Junior at St Mary's and Infant at St Peter's) and church-owned village halls.

The parishes also enjoy extremely high levels of affluence. The credit ratings agency, Experian, has rated Tandridge District (together with the Isle of Wight) as having the lowest overall risk of poverty of 322 local authorities[677], whilst a

[676] *The Parish of Tandridge* (Tandridge Parish Council, 1994), p.16.
[677] Cf. 'Poverty in England: How Experian ranks where you live', in *The Guardian,* 6th March 2012.

recent feature in the Daily Telegraph rated Oxted as the twentieth richest town in Britain. Certainly the 2001 census data for the United Benefice bear this out: showing, for example, approximately one-third of all males in employment holding senior management positions.[678]

The ethnic profile of the communities is some 95% white British, with, accordingly, a high level of nominal or 'dormant' Christianity. At the 2011 census, a large proportion of the local population in both parishes (67% for Oxted, 68% for Tandridge) identified themselves as Christian, which, when compared to a combined electoral role for both churches of only 224, implies a considerable 'broadly Christian' penumbra ripe for social analysis.[679] This high level of Christian affiliation, coupled with such strong community cohesion, invites the question as to the relationship between the two, which this parochial study sought to explore.

'Everything in its place': the experience of parish in Oxted and Tandridge

'You see a parish church and somehow everything's in its place'. This comment, made by an Oxted resident during conversation about this research, reveals everything and nothing about parochial life: hinting at a profound sense of local identity but raising as many questions as it answers – not least, 'how?', 'why?' and 'for whom?' Parish clergy often find themselves the recipients of such sentiment and in the visibility of their role they become a ready focus for people's perceptions of church and community. The restrictions of space - and the primary place being given to the photo-elicitation study - allow no more than a small sample of the field notes recording these to be included here. Nevertheless, these (which will, necessarily, be written in the first person) may serve to illuminate the empirical focus of what follows.

[678] 2011 Census data, collated for each Anglican parish by the Archbishops' Council Research and Statistics Unit. Whilst relatively high, this figure marks a ten per cent decrease from the 2001 figure for Oxted parish.
[679] This notwithstanding the attendance at other churches in the town.

'Rocking Reverend Arrives'

The commencement of this case study coincided with my arrival as incumbent of the United Benefice and, having moved from a parish of similar size, but a very different social context (Gipsy Hill, in South-East London), the immediate impression was of being, in a sense, 'public property'. Perhaps the most surprising instance of this came after a short interview for the local newspaper, The Surrey Mirror, in which my musical hobbies had been mentioned. Two days later, placards announcing 'Oxted: Rocking Reverend Arrives' had appeared outside every newsagent and garage. Entertainment value aside, the high profile given to this headline – the very fact that it was 'news' displayed the extent to which the parish priest's role concerned the whole town and not only their church congregation.

The boundary between congregation and parish is not always clear, especially in such a context: soon after moving in, a (non-churchgoing) neighbour who introduced themselves to me over the garden hedge listed certain members of the St Mary's congregation whom they knew, adding 'she's one of your…is it, *parishioners*?'.

Nevertheless, conversations recorded during these first weeks reveal the extent to which locals considered St Mary's to be 'our' church – and me to be 'their' priest, whether or not they attended worship. 'You our new vicar?' asked a taxi driver, deliberately pulling over to hand me a business card, whilst a member of the Oxted Royal British Legion (again, not a Sunday worshipper), enquiring about a forthcoming funeral, asked 'is it at *our* church'? Such comments accord with Russell's view that traditional patterns of belonging in the countryside are more

about i*dentification with* a community than *participation in* its activities or organisation.[680]

'We will remember them'

A principal point in the year at which St Mary's maintains its role as 'our' church is during the Armistice Day commemorations each November. Whilst in my previous South London parish, Remembrance Sunday had become a mere husk of memory, here in Oxted, it was an enduring ritual, a dramatising of communal memory within the language of Christian faith.[681]

Central to this commemoration was the gathering of several hundred people at the memorial in Master Park, Oxted's main recreation ground. Present at the head of this group were community leaders (such as chairs of school governors, local councillors) and uniformed organisations, which were led in prayer by the parish priest before reading the Commendation and keeping the Two Minute Silence. Following this, the gathering proceeded to walk slowly up to St Mary's along Church Lane (which the police close to traffic for the occasion), led by pipers, drummers and a standard bearer, before gathering again in church for the service of Remembrance, at which some three hundred people were present – the joint highest congregation of the year (the other being the Christmas Eve Nativity Service).

Whilst a familiar ritual for many English people, it is all too easy to overlook the spatial significance of such customs within local communities.[682] Encountering it for the first time, Remembrance Sunday appeared as a vital indicator of both 'parish' and 'belonging', involving the production of a 'traditioned' form of social space, whose precise territorial enactment was key. The church, as represented by both building and parish priest, hallows and 'interprets' this local remembrance in explicitly Christian terms.

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[680] Russell, *Country Parish*, c.6.
[681] For the social and anthropological significance of such rituals, c.f. Thomas Eriksen, *Small Places, Large Issues*, c14.
[682] *Ibid*., p.34.

'Evening, Vicar!'

A less solemn, but no less significant, indicator of 'parochial spirit' arose during a visit with my family to Oxted's Barn Theatre, to attend the Christmas pantomime. It is customary for local references to season the script of this riotous annual event in the social calendar, and it soon transpired that the cast had been alerted to my likely attendance that evening. Consequently, as soon as the dame in the pantomime had delivered her first risqué joke of the evening, she turned aside to look at me and announce 'Evening, Vicar!' – losing no opportunity thereafter to involve the unwitting incumbent in every mildly compromising scenario, to great hilarity among the audience.

Reflecting on the incident afterwards, it seemed that the parish priest was uniquely prone to such public references, not least because of certain communal traditions in British farce, in which the vicar is held up to affectionate ridicule. Whatever their merits or standing in the community, it was hard to imagine the ministers of any of the other denominations in Oxted being 'owned' in this way. In such respects, the parish priest remains the 'parson': the personification of otherwise disembodied ideas and associations. As William Blackstone expressed it in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765):

> He is called parson, *persona*, because by his person the church, which is an invisible body, is represented; and he is in himself a body corporate.[683]

In such encounters, the exceptional role of the incumbent as a signifier of neighbourhood is always evident. In Irving Goffman's terms, he or she permits 'normal appearances' of social interplay to be suspended: the Rector's 'corporate person' - especially when adorned with the key visual signifier of the clerical collar - is, by definition, approachable. If the parish priest were to respond to the many unlikely 'neighbourly' approaches, hails and smiles from strangers in an

[683] William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, book 1 chapter 11: http://www.lonang.com/exlibris/blackstone/bla-111.htm, accessed 29/6/15. Tate notes the interpretation of 1894 Parish Councils Act that the incumbent is a 'corporation sole'. *Parish Chest*, p.13.

aggressive or ignorant manner, 'alarm signals' denoting the breaking of an unspoken social contract would be quick to follow. For better or for worse, the priest embodies the neighbourly ethics of the parish - they are expected to act, as it were, 'parochially'.[684]

'This wretched word, parish!'

The final observation in this brief sample of parochial encounters came from the Graveyard manager of St Mary's, Oxted. It was prompted by the confusion that regularly arises over which graveyard belongs to the civil parish of Oxted and which to the parish church. The situation is not aided by the churchyard (which remains open for interments of local residents) being situated alongside the 'Oxted Parish Burial Ground', whose care and administration is in the hands of the parish clerk and local authority. Both lie adjacent to St Mary's Church. On an almost weekly basis, the time of the church's graveyard manager – and incumbent – is wasted following up burial enquiries that have come to the wrong ground, and issues over the care of these grounds regularly prompt further headlines (and placards around town) from the *Surrey Mirror*.

'It's all because of this wretched word, 'parish'', was the weary view of the St Mary's sexton. His telling comment revealed how, more than a century after the Parish Councils Act separated local civil and religious authorities, there are still areas of life (especially those concerning death, apparently), in which the particular connotations of 'parish' cause a blurring of the boundaries between what is regarded as 'sacred' and 'secular' - and determine the nature of the relationship between the established church and local government.
These anecdotal fragments, included as a preface to the findings of the empirical research, confirm the parish priest's role, not only as someone who 'belongs' in the local scene, but who is called upon to enable and express for others the transcendent dimension of local belonging.

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[684] For Goffman, such presentations are necessarily 'regional', describing the performative nature of any public persona as their 'front region'. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969), c.4.

'Bigger than the church': focus groups in Oxted and Tandridge

A series of seven focus groups, involving a total of sixty-four people, was held in Oxted and Tandridge between March and July 2012. Varying widely in size from three to eighteen members, the groups took place within associations or societies where the members already knew one another and, in most cases, were already meeting as a pre-existing body. Whilst this was sensible in terms of practical arrangements, the decision to conduct the research within existing groups was primarily an ethnographic one, designed to interpret the quality of community life already 'in place' in these neighbourhoods and to draw out the role the parish church played within it.[685] Significantly, most of these groups straddled the border between 'church' (or, 'congregation') and 'parish' to a greater or lesser degree. Most included members who, nominally at least, saw themselves as identifying with the congregation of St Mary's, Oxted or St Peter's, Tandridge, as well as others who were members of different denominations, or, in many cases, none.

As explained above, the combination of Tandridge and Oxted in this case study allowed for the groups (the majority of which were in Oxted, by far the larger parish) and data to be both compared and compounded to give an overall impression of parish life in the united benefice. The focus groups were as follows:

In Oxted:

1) 'Quest' youth group.
2) 'Tic Toc' women's Group.
3) St Mary's Junior School Staff.
4) Barn Theatre

[685] Ethical considerations of informed consent and privacy were especially pertinent for a case study of this kind. Whilst a more straightforward matter within the photo-elicitation groups, where a pro-forma was completed by participants, the field notes were potentially a little more complex as they gathered micro-level observations about, for example, transitory snatches of conversation or patterns of behaviour. Informed consent was neither possible nor desirable for every such piece of data, but anonymity has been protected in any notes that have been written up below.

5) Rectory Home Group

In Tandridge:

1) Tandridge Book Group.
2) St Peter's School Governors.

A total of eight pictures were used in the focus groups, with four being used in each session. The images used were a mix of contemporary photographs and historical depictions (either photographs, etchings or paintings), three of the latter (2, 4 & 6 below) being deliberately chosen for their 'nostalgic' overtones. As has been noted, the central place of the parish church in the English landscape is an indicator of the kind of historical 'belonging' at the heart of this study, and it was important to gauge whether such images still had resonance in the contemporary setting.

Whilst most of the pictures depicted the exterior of the church building, each group also saw at least one image of the interior. In most cases also, the groups discussed one picture of the neighbouring parish church in order to ascertain the differences in response to 'their' parish church. The images used, numbered for reference, are shown below:

1. Inside St Mary's

2. St Mary's & Court Farm

3. St Mary's tower

4. St Mary's porch

5. St Peter's Spring

6. St Peter's Winter

7. St Peter's eighteenth century

8. St Peter's interior

The dedication of each group to this exercise was agreed in advance and the meetings followed a similar pattern: facilitated by me, with each session lasting between thirty and forty-five minutes. Notwithstanding the possible 'filtering' of people's responses in the presence of 'the Rector', my personal facilitation of the groups was judged to be a necessary aspect of an exercise in which I operated as both researcher-practitioner and participant-observer.

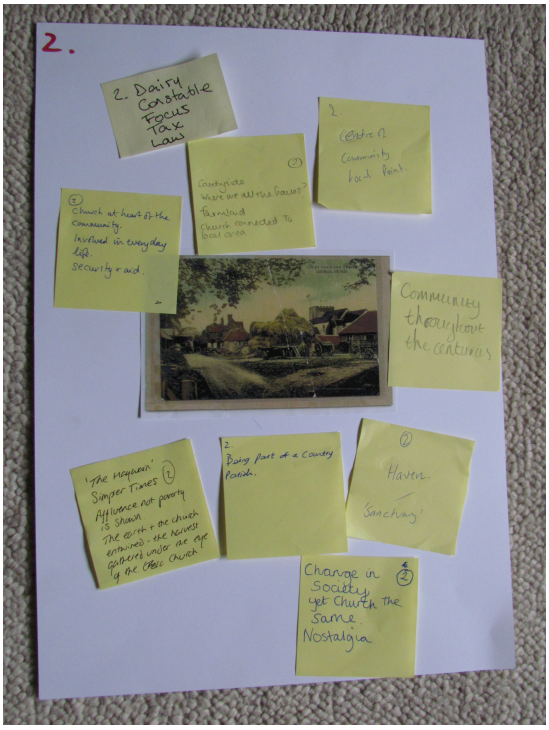
At the beginning of each meeting, the context of the research was explained and permission letters and forms were circulated among the group. The facilitator, however, offered minimal background to the subject and great care was taken not to introduce key themes or words (such as 'community' or 'place') that might influence members' responses. The groups then featured two exercises: a word-association exercise, followed by the main pictorial study. The word-association exercise was used to 'warm up' participants, both to the subject matter and to the practice of visual association and used a series of 'Visual Explorer' photographic cards, commonly used in training seminars.[686] The cards, featuring a multitude of different images, were spread on the floor and the participants (larger meetings were split in two groups), were then asked to select a card which they associated with the word 'church', followed by one with which they associated the word 'parish'. Each person was asked to explain to the rest of the group why they had chosen their particular card, with another group member writing down their comments on a flip-chart.

After this initial exercise, four pictures of the parish churches, attached to display boards, were placed around the room and participants were each given a supply of sticky notelets and pens. They were asked to spend as much time as they liked, in silence, looking at each picture in turn and writing on their notes, their responses to two questions:

1) What does this picture represent to you?
2) What feelings or associations does it evoke?

[686] Further details about Visual Explorer resources may be accessed at http://www.cclexplorer.org

These responses, often just a list of descriptive words (for example, 'beauty, comfort, happy memories') were then stuck on the board surrounding each picture. Once all had completed this exercise, the participants were thanked and either proceeded with the rest of their meeting, or departed.



After the session, the responses from both exercises were transcribed into a spreadsheet, the comments from each participant being recorded on separate lines. There was no editing of responses, with some inevitably contributing more data than others. Once this was all recorded, a process of 'coding' began, so that instances and frequencies of certain key phrases ascribed to the images might be measured and then 'abstracted' into 'indicators' and concepts that could then be translated into theoretical conclusions. The following coding categories were developed to comprehend the gathered data:

1. Territory. All explicit references to space, maps or terrain were included under this category, as well as human geographic and locational terms, for example, 'centre'.

2. History. Included all comments referring to tradition and age - 'ancient' being a recurrent example.

3. Community. Under this head was included all data referring to a common social life: 'togetherness', for example: also 'soft' emotions relating to 'home', 'nurturing' and so on.

4. Boundaries. Included as a smaller category as it is a specific interest in this research. This included references to 'us and them' as well as references to circumstances where parish boundaries caused issues difficulties – for example 'who cuts the grass in which graveyard?'

5. Cultural Memory. Included as distinct from 'history' above to capture all personal, communal and anecdotal resonances of the pictures, including references to films or literature. Also included here were words that indicated a loss of memory, for example: 'forgotten'.

6. Rootedness. Another smaller category, distinguished from both 'history' and 'territory' to record instances in the data relating specifically to stability or settlement. Words such as 'unchanging', 'timeless' and 'idyllic' were included under this code.

7. Worship. This coding grouped responses that concerned both explicit references to worship (for example, 'puts God in a place of honour') and more implicit instances of transcendence referring to feelings of peace, holiness or awareness of mortality.

8. Welcome. Images of the church often provoked associations that had to do with feeling welcome or unwelcome in the parish church. As an indicator of 'belonging' this was included as a separate category.

9. Negative. Any negative associations (for example, 'scary', 'bleak' or 'church mafia') were included under this code. If the comment pertained clearly to another category (for example 'not welcome'), then the comment was coded for both 'welcome ' and 'negative'.

10. Don't understand. Used for those comments that made explicit their incomprehension of the exercise or the terms employed.

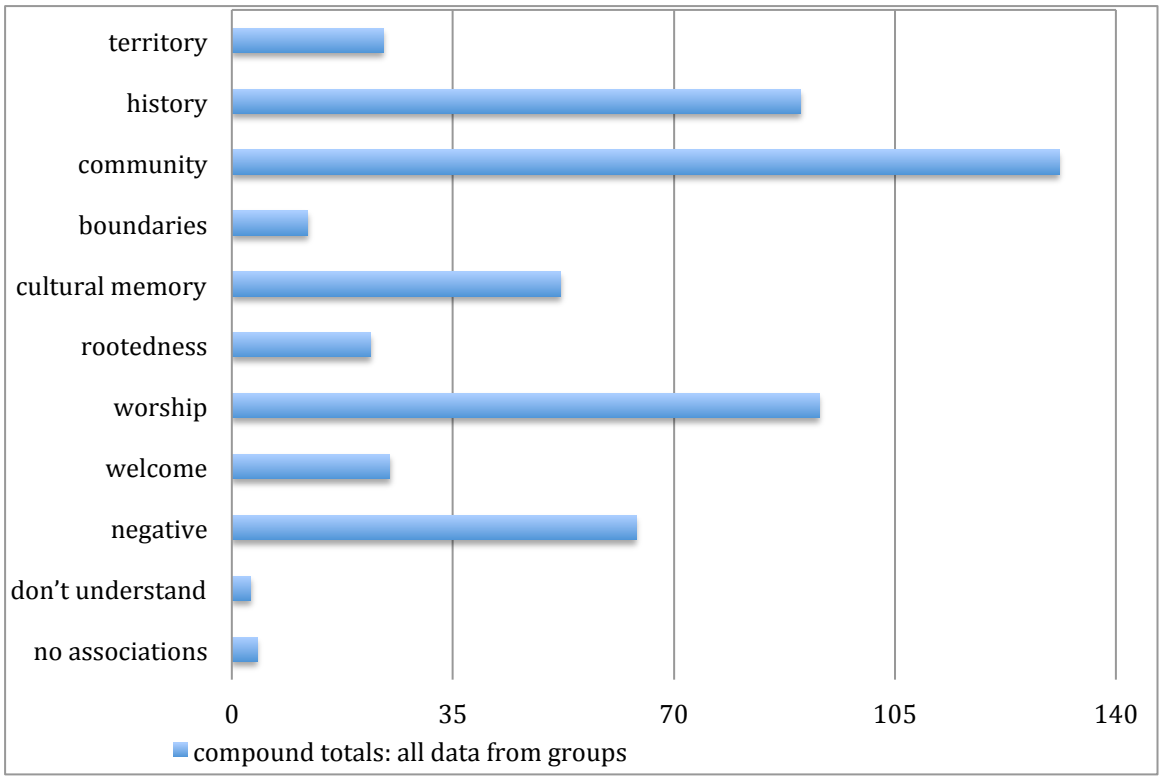
11. No associations. The final category was for those comments that expressed no associations or resonance with the words or pictures under discussion.

Every piece of data (single words or phrases) submitted by participants was coded and scored a '1' on the spreadsheet in the relevant category, with 520 pieces of data being recorded in total. Where comments fell into more than one category, they were included under each relevant coding. To take one example, 'historic, warm, welcoming, inviting, spiritual, happy, holy' was the response of one participant in reference to a picture of St Mary's Church. This comment thus gained an entry under categories 2, 7 and 8 above. The only comments left uncategorised (and therefore, effectively 'unused') were those simply describing the detail of the picture they were viewing (for example, 'a fish' or 'a church tower'): all associations with the image, however (eg: 'reminds me of home'), were recorded.

Once the data had been categorised accordingly, the results could be tabulated and the patterns and emphases in people's responses seen. After some initial observations about the overall results, it will be useful to analyse each focus group in turn, before drawing some conclusions on the project.

Initial observations from the data

Across the seven focus groups - and including all data for both exercises - the categorised results of the study may be tabulated thus:



In attempting to draw even preliminary observations from the above, it must be recognised that numerous variables will have been at play, influencing the data gathered. The responses to the second exercise, for example, are necessarily particular to a specific set of pictures, rather than an idealised or generalised depiction of 'parish church'. The choice of these images was not arbitrary, but designed with this case study in mind, and influenced by the particular themes being pursued. Quite clearly, they are comments to *this* parish priest about *these* depictions of *these* churches!

The church buildings chosen to mediate such associations also happen to be extremely old: both are Grade One-listed and have stood for between 800 and 1000 years. It would not be surprising, therefore, if many of the comments regarding them related to their permanence or ancient status. To this it might be countered that the very age of the churches considered is a positive strength of the study: reflecting accurately the endurance of the parish system under investigation. After all, it is precisely because it is so ancient that the parish church remains so rich a symbol.

Notwithstanding the particularity of the data, some initial themes are immediately apparent: the first being general prevalence (with 131 instances) of the data referring to 'community'. The word 'community', together with its variants 'communion' and 'communal' was by far the most frequently occurring word in the data, suggesting that the parish church is a key aspect of the 'social imaginary' in these neighbourhoods and continues to play a unique role in nurturing a sense of common life.

The second impression is that participants' associations with their parish churches were, on the whole, remarkably positive. Accepting that many of them were connected with the church – and that they were responding to the parish priest - the number of explicitly negative comments was lower than might have been anticipated.

Even lower was the amount of data that indicated 'no associations' with the parish church. In the wake of the secularisation thesis and its much-vaunted 'God is Dead' depictions of shuttered church buildings, whose symbolic resonance has been all but evacuated from British society, these results could not present a more startling challenge. The parish churches under investigation here evidently continue to have a powerful semiotic value for all those questioned.

Before any further conclusions can be drawn, however, the detail of the findings must be examined and explained, taking each group in turn. In this section, the results for the 'church' part of the word-association exercise will be omitted from the analysis, being effectively a 'warm-up' for the principal focus on 'parish'.

Group-by-group analysis

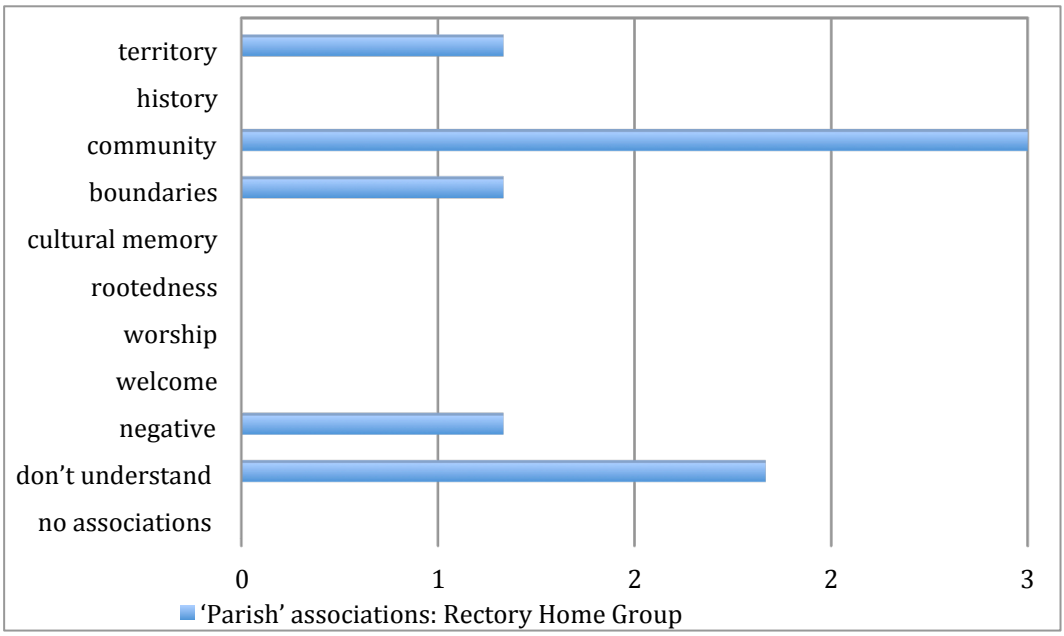
1. Rectory Home Group

Date: 22/3/12
Number of participants: 5 (2M/3F)
Age range: 40-75
Pictures used: 1, 2, 3 & 5

The Rectory home group meets as a Bible study and prayer group, begun by St Mary's Church in January 2012, with the particular purpose of welcoming and supporting members of the church who are new to Christian faith or to this congregation. Its relevance for this case study was as a means of testing the significance of parish for those with less experience of Anglican practice than others.

The first exercise drew out some fascinating responses. Whilst several comments were prefaced with uncertainty about the meaning of 'parish', the associations that followed nevertheless tended towards the communal and local. For example, one participant wrote down: 'not really sure what a parish is but I thought 'geographical area' and quite small and countrified'.

The picture-association exercise that followed was notable in being one of the few groups in which 'community' had a greatly reduced value in the data, with 'history' and 'worship' categories scoring highest. Also interesting was the relatively high number of negative comments about the parish church in this section and the slightly 'forbidding' nature of its appearance in the photographs.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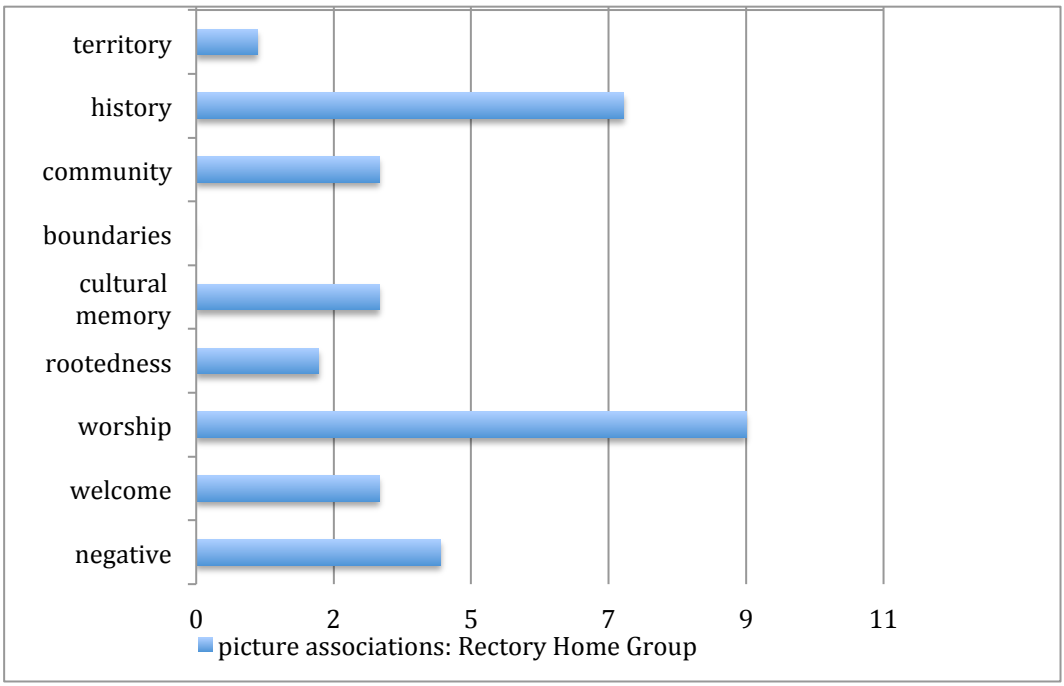
'Parish' associations: Rectory Home Group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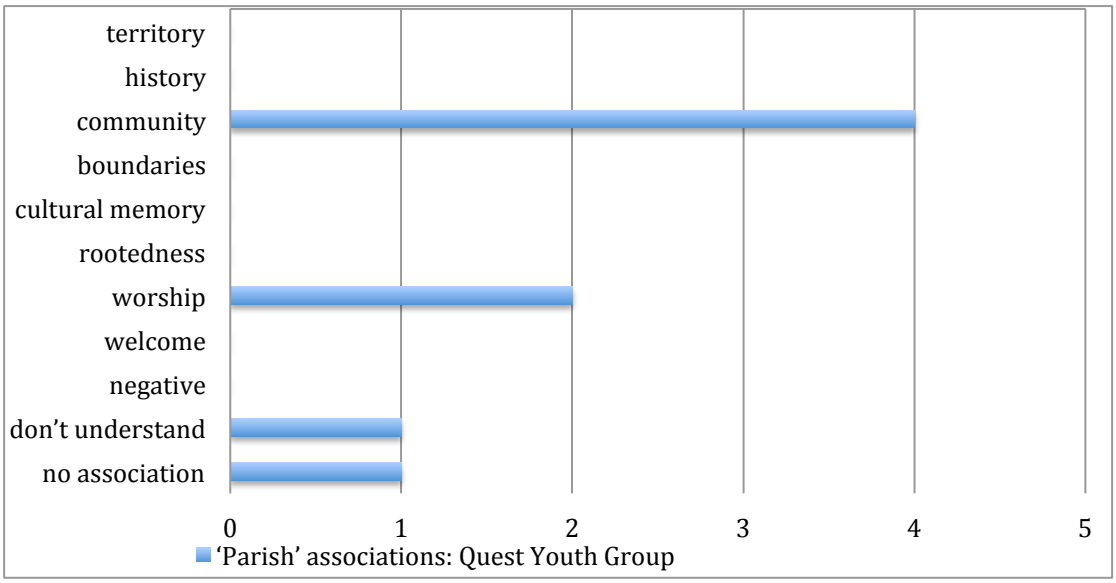
picture associations: Rectory Home Group

2. 'Quest' Youth Group

Date: 16/5/12
Number of participants: 6 (4M/2F)
Age range: 14-18
Pictures used: 1, 2, 3, 4

Quest is a group for teenage boys and girls aged 14-18, led by the youth worker from St Mary's, Oxted. The group includes young people who are members of various local churches and several who have no church allegiance. The inclusion of this focus group was essential, given the comparatively high age range of the other groups - affording an insight into how the parish church might be perceived by a generation which, as recent research by Abby Day (2009) has claimed, 'believe in belonging'.[687] Whilst the amount of data gathered was small, the associations with 'parish' in the first exercise were largely related to community: phrases such a 'big group' and 'communion' were used, as well as one participant for whom the word had no meaning. The 'church' associations also generated some interesting comment in this case; one participant choosing a photo-card that reminded him of church because it was 'in the middle of everything - everything goes out from it'. The participants' responses to the images of the parish church again showed a high count for 'historical' associations - with, as before, a fairly high number of negative impressions ('boring', 'creepy' and so on). Picture 2, an obviously 'nostalgic' portrayal of St Mary's Church in the nineteenth century, depicted alongside the neighbouring farm, elicited the thoughtful response, 'looks like the church has always been part of the community'.

[687] Abby Day, 'Believing in Belonging: An ethnography of young people's constructions of belief', *Culture and Religion* 10:3 (2009) p.263.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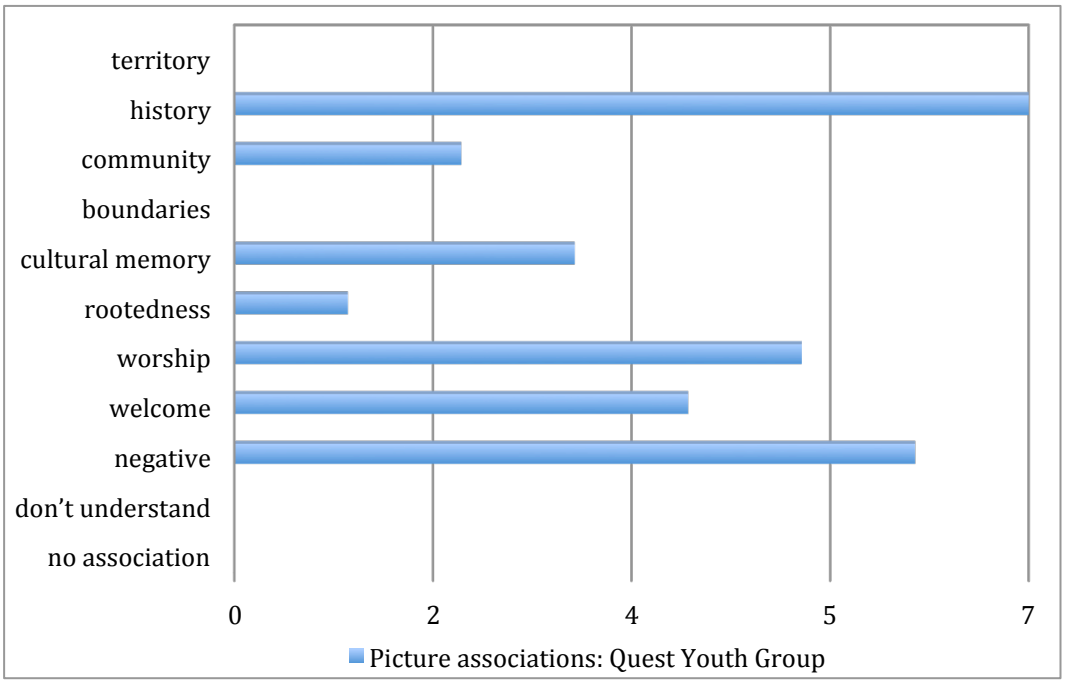
'Parish' associations: Quest Youth Group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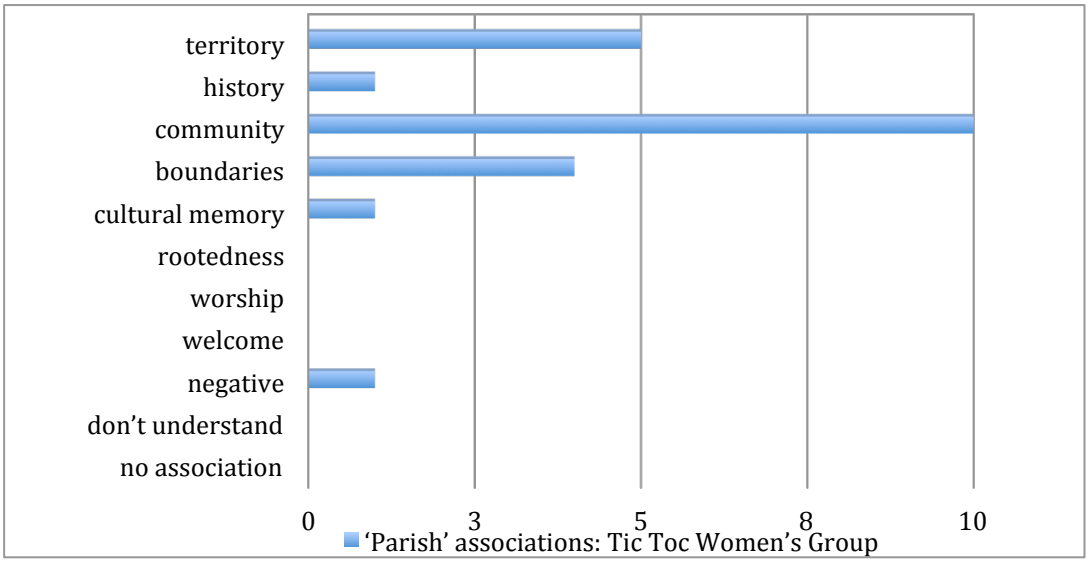
Picture associations: Quest Youth Group

3. ‘Tic Toc’ Womens’ Group

Date: 23/4/12
Number of participants: 14 (14F)
Age range: 40-75
Pictures used: 1, 2, 3, 4

‘Tic Toc’ (‘Together in Christ, Together in Oxted Churches’) is an ecumenical group for fellowship and discussion, attended by women from various Oxted churches, including members of St Mary’s. This group was chosen in order to gauge the associations with the parish church from those who ‘belong’ to church but not necessarily to the ‘parish’. As a group that seeks to work across existing boundaries, it was another useful social network for this research.

Perhaps unremarkably, ‘community’ rated extremely highly in the initial word-association exercise. Outstanding, however, was the high degree of articulacy the group displayed about what the concept of parish implied: ‘The whole community within a geographical location’ was one response; ‘the land, people and animals that surround the church’ being another. A strong sense of what one participant called ‘the physical boundaries of the land’ also came through in this exercise, giving the highest scoring of all the groups in the ‘territory’ category.
Lengthy discussion among fourteen participants led into the picture-association exercise, which found community, history and worship, at the forefront of the data gathered. ‘A feeling of being part of tradition’ was one comment that typified the sense of belonging shared by many in the group. Among the smaller categories, ‘rootedness’ gained a significant response, with comments such as ‘faith passed on’ and ‘historic continuity’ being common. One response to the ‘nostalgic’ picture 2 noted ‘old-fashioned, but where the church is still’, evoking the permanence associated with the parish church.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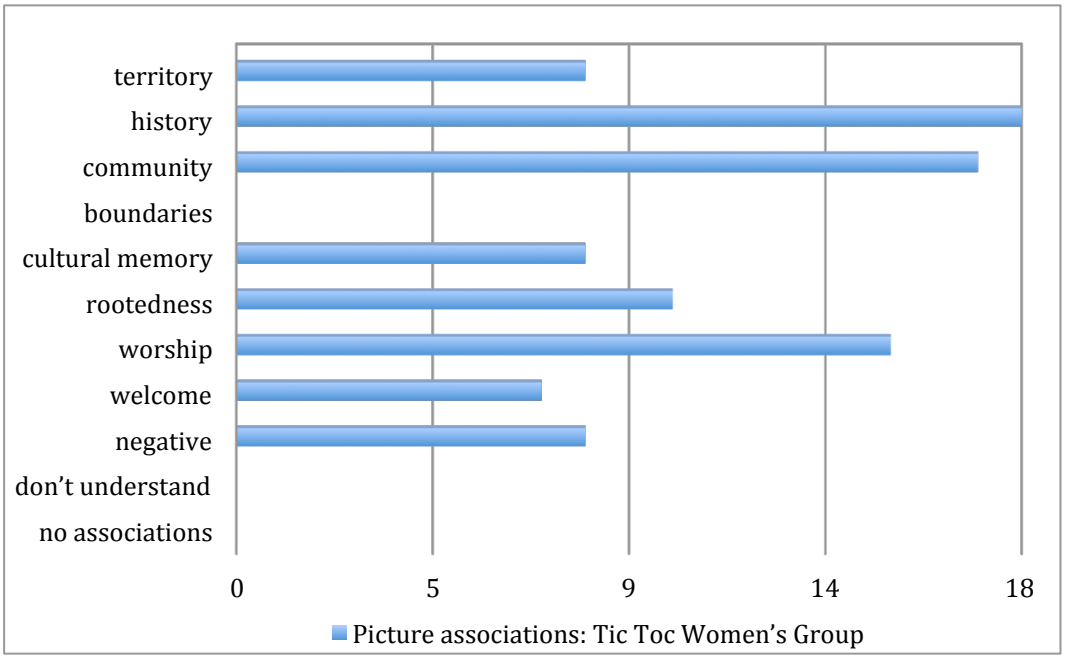
'Parish' associations: Tic Toc Women's Group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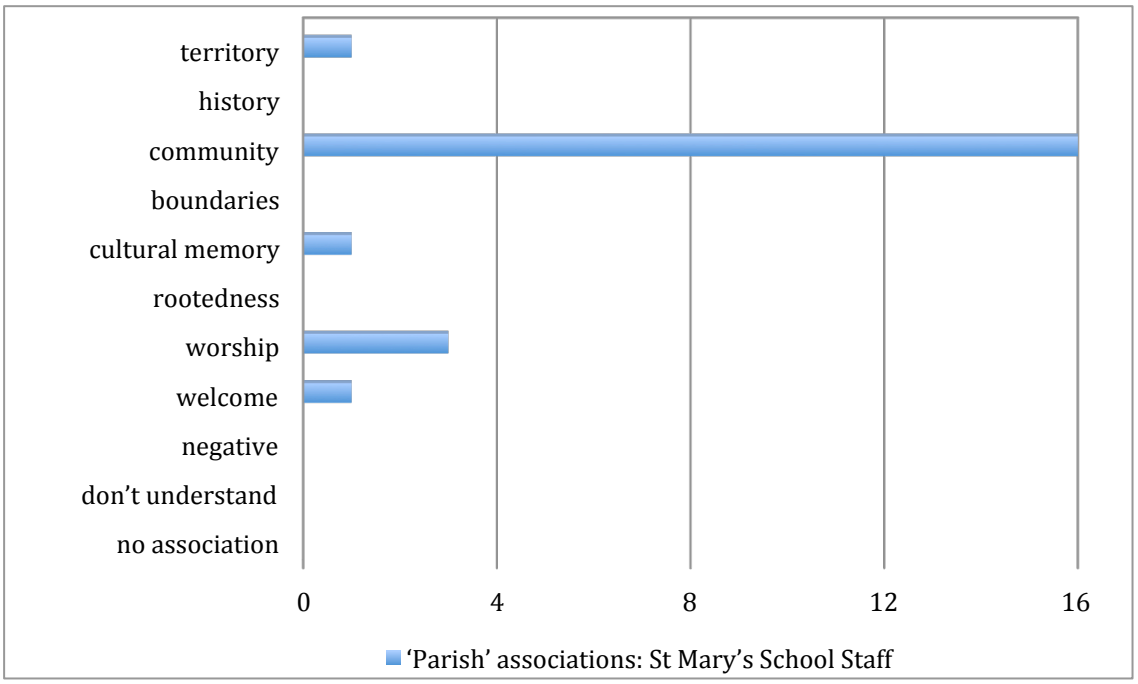
Picture associations: Tic Toc Women's Group

4. St Mary's School Staff

Date: 16/4/12
Number of participants: 19 (17F/2M)
Age range: 25-60
Pictures used: 1, 2, 3, 4

St Mary's School is a Voluntary (Aided) Church of England Junior school in the heart of Oxted, with strong links to the parish church. Some members of staff are practising Christians (one or two being members of St Mary's Church), while others are not. The occasion for this session was an inset day for staff at the beginning of term, of which the focus group formed the last part. Another large and predominantly female group, it was, like 3) above, split into two groups for both exercises.

As before, words in the 'community' category (including, here, an explicit reference to 'belonging') ranked by far the highest in association with the word 'parish' - indeed, 'community' was employed by eight of the nineteen participants in their response. One interesting response, coded under 'territory' described parish as 'something bigger than the church', indicating the broader social resonance of the term. Whilst historical associations did not feature at all in this section, they were to the fore in the second exercise, as the results below display. It was especially interesting to gauge responses to picture 4, an early-twentieth century etching of the South door of St Mary's Church. This picture has hung in the foyer of the school for several years, and is thus an important visual link between church and school. Responses to it were strikingly varied, however - ranging from the cosily familiar ('small community where everybody is known') to several strongly negative associations ('death, crumbling, isolation'). With another strong showing for 'community' references, the majority of responses in this group came loosely under the 'worship' heading, however - with transcendent associations such as 'peaceful' and 'tranquil' being most widely used.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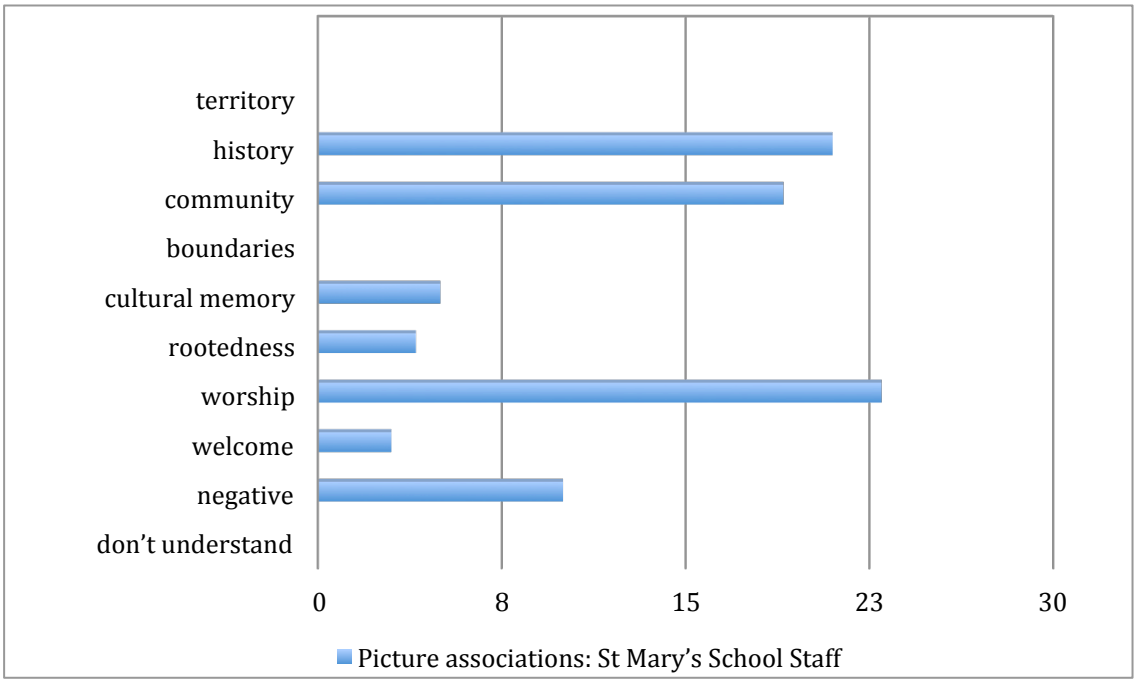
'Parish' associations: St Mary's School Staff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Picture associations: St Mary's School Staff

5. Barn Theatre

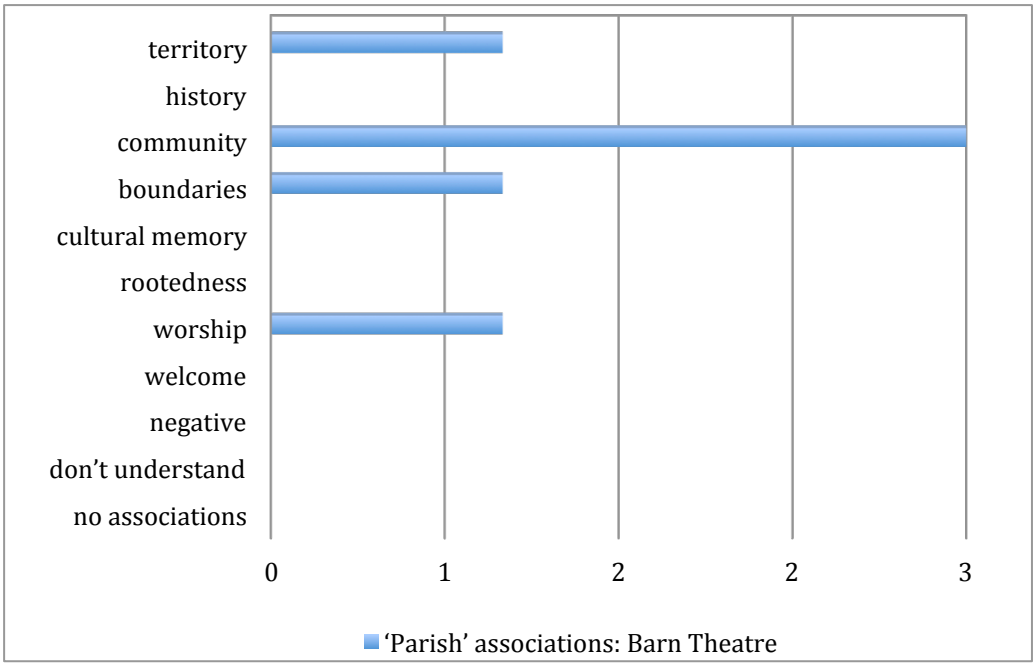
Date: 26/7/12
Number of participants: 3 (3M)
Age range: 40-50
Pictures used: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

The Barn Theatre is an important cultural and social centre in the town, and the Oxted Players are its principal amateur theatrical society. Selected (male) members of the Players formed this focus group: none of whom were regular churchgoers, though all knew me personally. As non-churchgoing men, this group was important for the demographic balance of the study and revealed some interesting responses.

Whilst history and worship scored highly, there was also a very strong result in the 'cultural memory' category, which came third highest (before 'community' in the picture responses). These included two references to the landscape artist John Constable (the latter in connection with picture 2), which, given Constable's significance in the portrayal of English pastoral nostalgia[688], was a telling piece of data. Intriguingly for this parish, Peter Bishop describes the artist as an essentially 'suburban' painter who represents an 'imaginative fulcrum' between the loss of rural culture and the encroaching city.[689]

Other cultural references included one to Chaucer and one that simply read 'Pink Floyd' (in reference to picture 5), the rock group being renowned for their distinctively English form of whimsical cultural recollection. Such responses, together with the high scorings for history and community, made this perhaps the most 'nostalgic' of the focus groups.

[688] Cf. Peter Bishop, *Archetypal Constable*, c.3.
[689] *Ibid*. pp.5-6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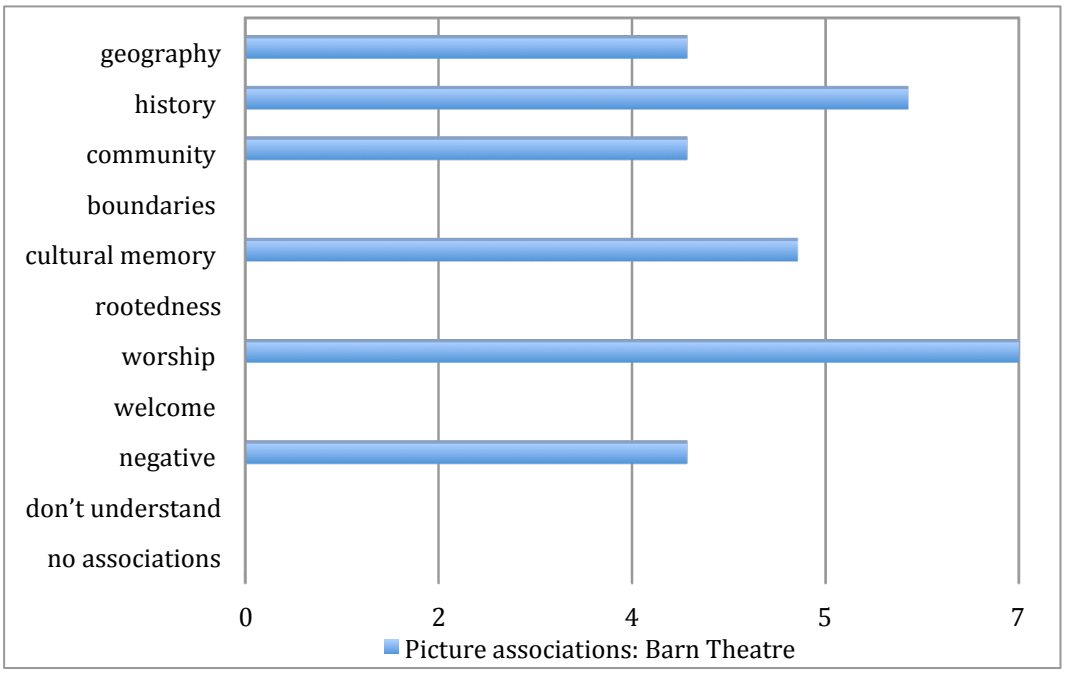
'Parish' associations: Barn Theatre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Picture associations: Barn Theatre

6. Tandridge Book Group

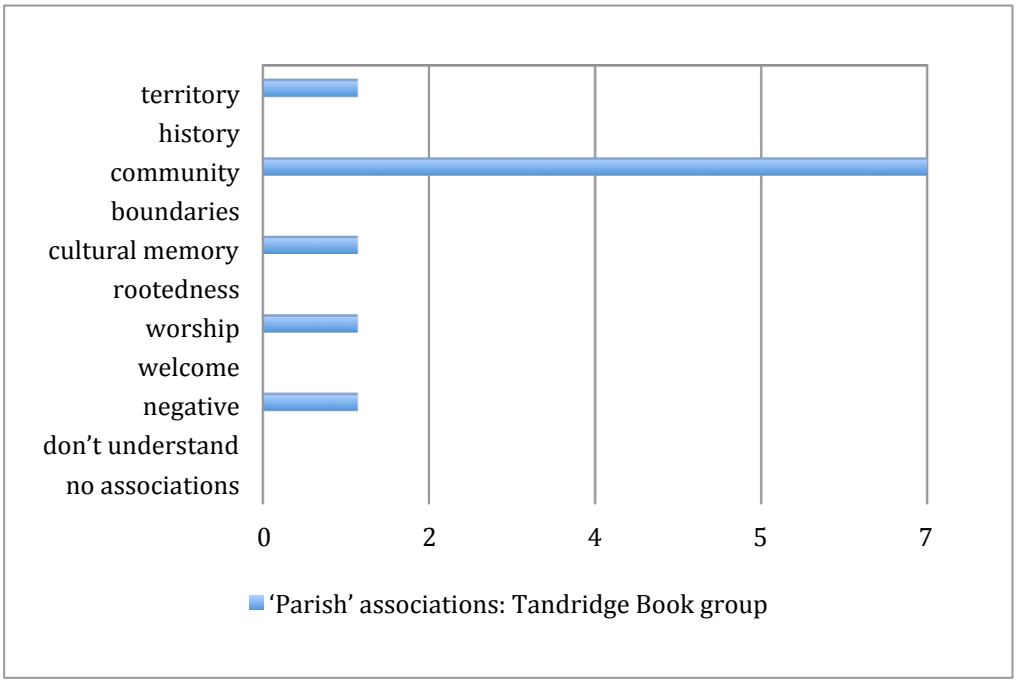
Date: 25/4/12
Number of participants: 14 (14F)
Age range: 35-60
Pictures used: 1, 5, 6, 7

This all-female group has met for several years and has a mainly social purpose (the book-reading, I was assured, came a definite second place to conversation and the consumption of wine!). It contains some members who attend the parish church, whilst the majority do not. As with Barn Theatre group above, the Tandridge Book Group provided an important 'window' into a locally-rooted group that had no overt connections to the church. Communal associations with the word 'parish' were by far the highest in the data recorded. The entry under 'territory' referred to one participant's choosing a photo-card of a map, whilst the 'memory' entry stemmed from another participant's association of parish with 'strong, matriarchal women'!

The pictures of the two parish churches yielded the most interesting data in this focus group, including a high level of negative associations. Three of the images depicted the parish church of St Peter's, Tandridge and one was of the inside of St Mary's, the neighbouring parish church.

There was a marked contrast between the associations made with picture 7 - a somewhat bleak painting of St Peter's in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century (which yielded many negative comments) and those with the more familiar and 'cosy' contemporary photographs. Picture 7 was generally perceived to be 'uninviting' (one comment memorably reading 'joyless Sunday walk') whilst pictures 5 and 6 generated a universal sense of belonging and fond reminiscence ('warm inside', 'how church should be'). This was a useful indicator that, as might be expected, the data was clearly affected by the beauty or otherwise of the church's aesthetic portrayal.

The latter was underlined by the inclusion of one photograph of St Peter's in the winter snow. Without exception, this prompted evocations of 'Christmas' from the participants, with other sentiments such as 'warm inside' similarly recalling a sense of festive nostalgia. This should not be too lightly dismissed, as Christmas celebrations at Tandridge are, along with Harvest, the central point at which the village, school and church communities combine. 'Christmas' is a thus a key indicator of cultural belonging in this parish.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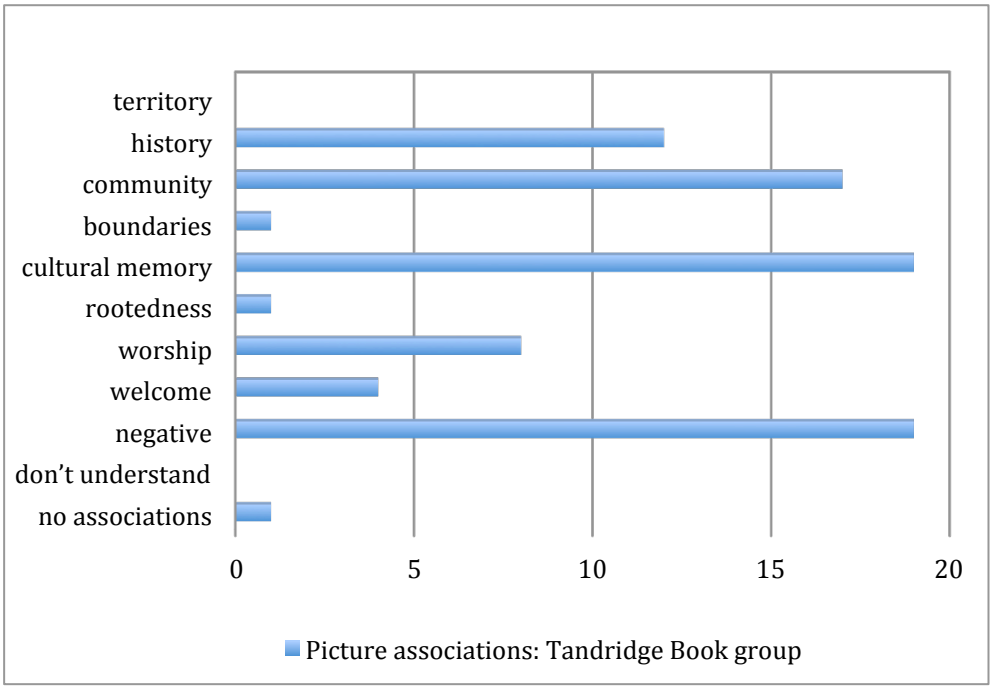
'Parish' associations: Tandridge Book group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Picture associations: Tandridge Book group

7. St Peter's School Governors

Date: 25/6/12
Number of participants: 3 (2F/1M)
Age range: 40-65
Pictures used: 1, 4, 5, 8

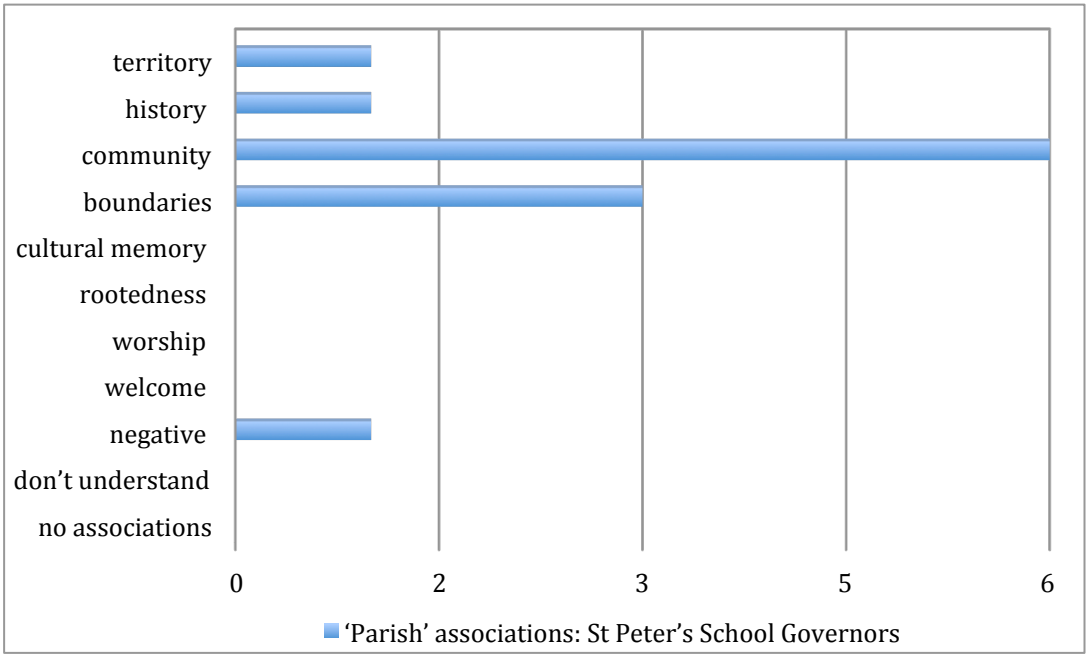
St Peter's is a Church of England Infant School which, like St Mary's Junior School in Oxted, enjoys strong links to the parish church. This group, held after a meeting of the full Governing board, comprised three Governors (one member of the congregation, two non-churchgoers), one of whom was the Head Teacher. Whilst a far smaller group than the equivalent meeting at St Mary's School, this session provided a harvest of useful data.

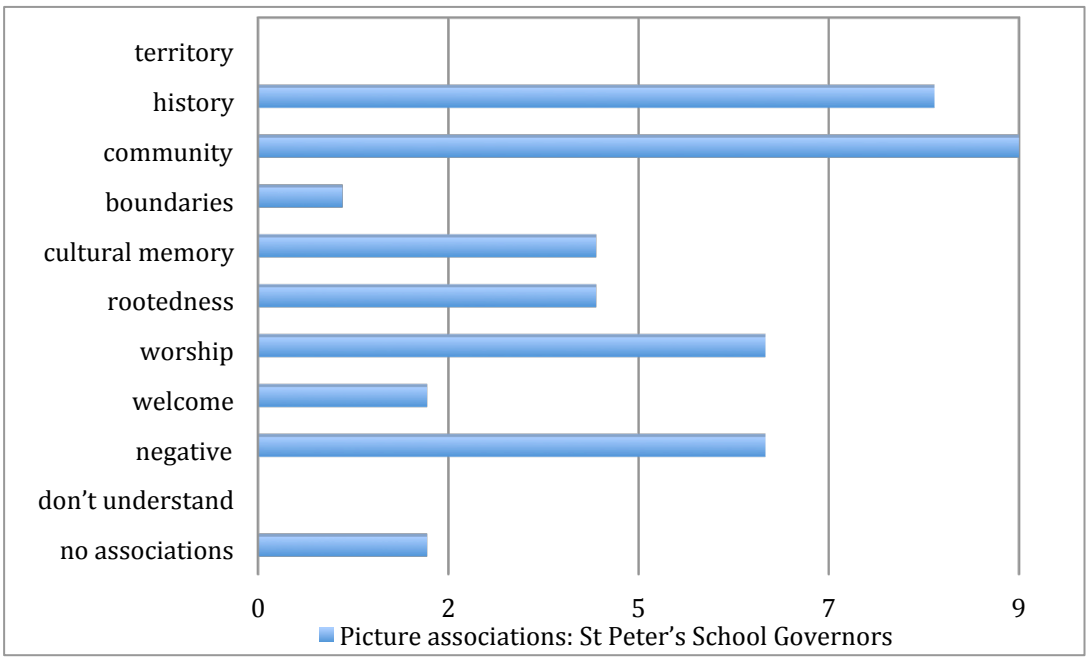
In addition to the high score for 'community in the first exercise, the notable feature of these responses was for comments in the 'boundaries' category. Here, the reality of parochial life 'on the ground' was much in evidence, especially in discussion around school admissions. These are often fiercely contested and the criteria the school employs to determine who is admitted (for example, residence within the village, or attendance at church) are all belonging-based.

Boundaries were also cited in regard to the relationship of the civil parish, which is responsible for certain areas of common land, to the ecclesiastical parish. 'Who's cutting the grass?' was one telling comment, whilst another wrote, simply, 'local fiefdoms'. These struggles explain the relatively high incidence of negative data in this exercise, which itself reveals the reality of parish as a concept in everyday life for residents of Tandridge.

The second exercise was perhaps less revealing, although the high score for historical and communal associations with images of the church ('structured society', for example) reinforces the predominance of social categories in the findings of this research. One other comment, referring to picture 4 (St Mary's

Church door, in the neighbouring parish) read 'Oxted versus Tandridge', hinting at the underlying tensions that underlie the distinction between the two parishes.

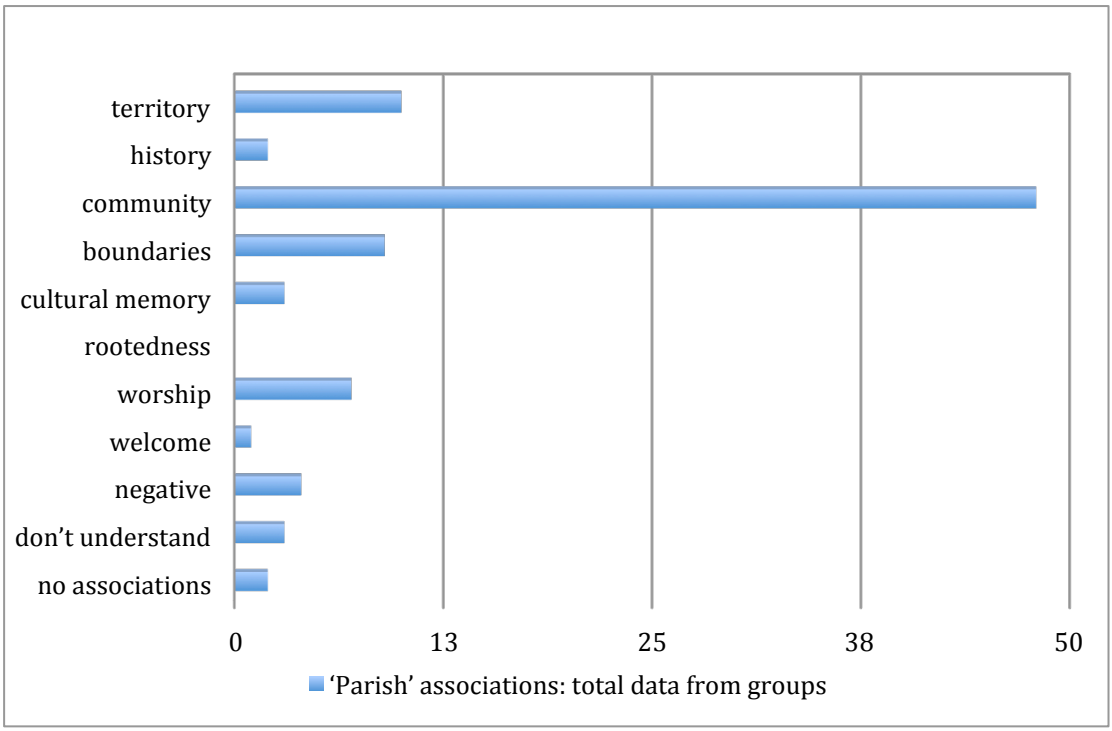


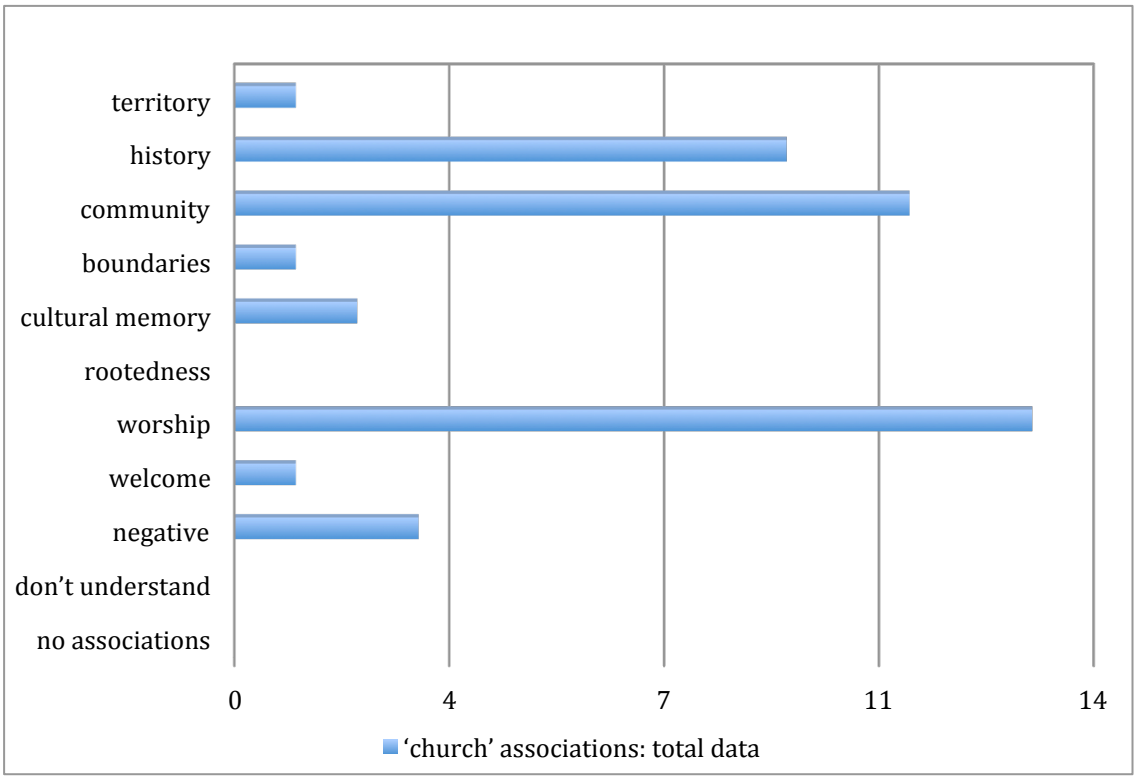


Comparative Analysis

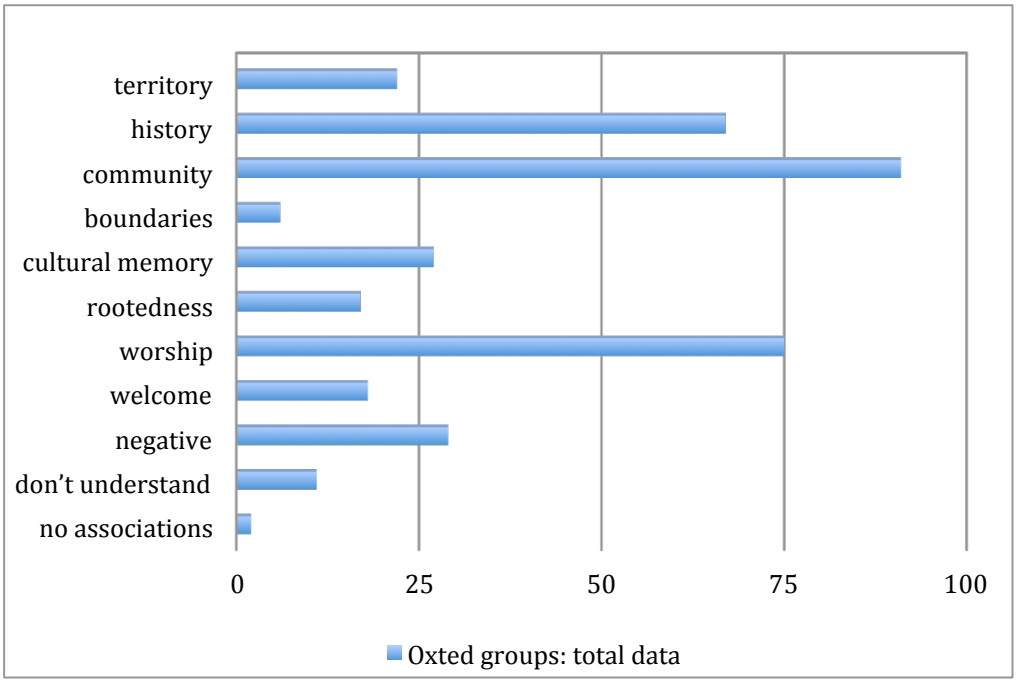
Before weighing the main theoretical conclusions from the above, it will be useful to complete the analytical picture by presenting some comparative figures from the data. Firstly, comparing the compound results of the first and second exercises reveals some interesting points of divergence. From the charts below, it is evident that, whilst community is by far the dominant category in association with the word 'parish', the results of the second exercise reveal a more complex pattern: 'history' narrowly beating 'worship' and 'community' into second and third places, respectively. The age of the churches doubtless played a significant part in this profile of response and it would be interesting to compare these results with the associations evoked by a more modern church building. Nevertheless, the profile for *these* parishes shows how significant is the ancient rooting of the parish churches in their communities. Secondly, it may be helpful to compare results for both sections of the first exercise, which, it will be recalled, requested participants to choose from a random assortment of photographic images, a single image that they associated with the word 'church', then another for the word 'parish'.

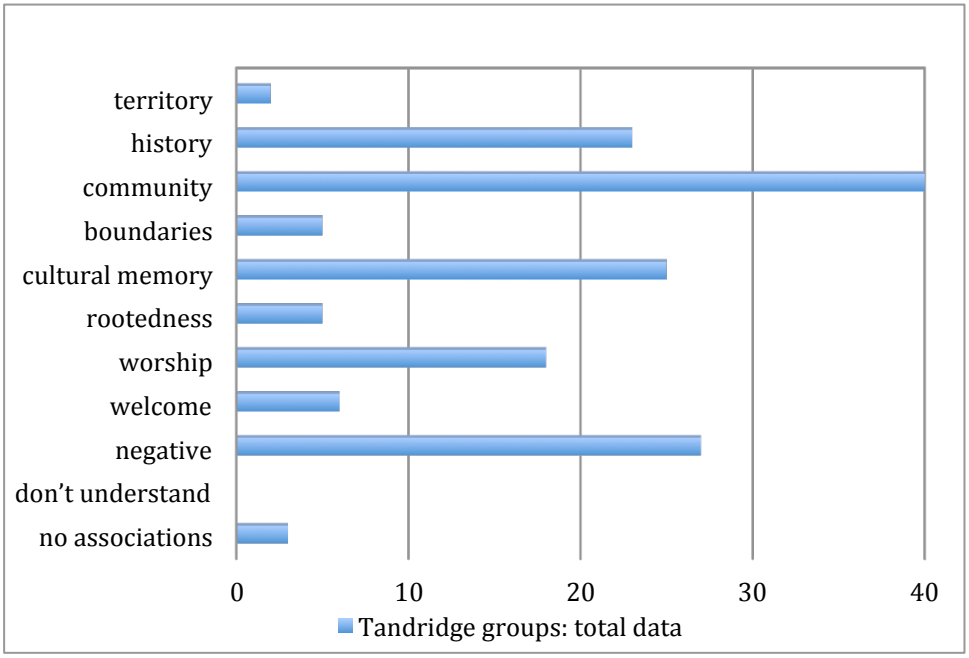
The detailed results for the 'church' connotations were of limited pertinence for this study (the word 'church' being too generic to provide any useful data), although their overall comparison with the 'parish' totals tabulated above sheds some additional light on the latter, less familiar word. Here, the overriding association with 'church' is, perhaps unsurprisingly, one of worship and transcendence, with community and history coming second and third, respectively:


territory
history
community
boundaries
cultural memory
rootedness
worship
welcome
negative
don't understand
no associations
0
13
25
38
50
'Parish' associations: total data from groups


territory
history
community
boundaries
cultural memory
rootedness
worship
welcome
negative
don't understand
no associations
0
4
7
11
14
'church' associations: total data

The third and final comparison to draw is between the two parishes of Oxted and Tandridge. Whilst 'community' appears as the highest-scoring category in both parishes, divergence appears in the high score given to 'cultural memory' in the two Tandridge groups, and the rather higher levels of negative comments. Comparing the compound data for the focus groups in each parish, the results are tabulated below:





Conclusion: the vitality of parish

A generation after *The Times* religion correspondent prophesied the imminent 'extinction' of the country parish[690], the sheer vitality and creative potential of the word itself must be the first observation to make from this research. In an era when it might reasonably be considered to have become emptied of meaning, 'parish' is demonstrably rich in symbolic meaning for the vast majority of participants, young or old - and a term that is indissolubly linked to place-attachment. The church buildings have been seen to mediate this attachment in an almost iconic fashion, 'hallowing' the space-time continuity of local society in Oxted and Tandridge.

Secondly, the most striking fact about the data is that the overwhelming amount of comments made suggested a sense of local belonging. Indeed, the 'community' index had originally been titled 'belonging' until it became evident that most of the other categories - rootedness, cultural memory and so on - were also, in effect, varieties of belonging. Although the predominance of the word 'community' in the data was revealing only in a general sense - given its 'catch-all' function in contemporary parlance for expressing a wide range of social ideas - when qualified by the other categories, its focus became much more refined and, therefore, empirically useful. The evidence clearly associated with the parish church a particular version of community: one which, crucially, was not defined by the indices of Christian allegiance normally employed in the sociology of religion.

One problem, perhaps, has been that, in the conversation about Grace Davie's phrase 'believing without belonging' (originally employed as a definition of British Christianity since 1945 but which has, Voas and Crockett (2005) observe, 'taken on a life of its own' in the sociology of religion[691]), attention has primarily

[690] An article from 1985, cited in Russell, *Country Parish*, p.235.
[691] David Voas & Alasdair Crockett, 'Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging', *Sociology* 39:1 (2005) p.12.

been paid to the former rather than the latter, the recent work by Abby Day (2009) being a welcome exception. 'Belonging' has tended to be seen in institutional, congregational terms rather than primarily - as this research would seem to suggest - a form of local attachment. Yet the distinction between parish and congregation is vital in specifically Anglican analysis - a point Douglas Davies has recognised:

> The difference … between a 'congregation' and a 'parish' in England is potentially great, for … to be a parishioner … does not necessarily involve a great deal of congregational involvement.[692]

For the parishioner, 'belonging' is, by definition, parochial. It may have little explicitly to do with Christian 'believing', but it signifies affiliation to a particular view of communal relationship, one in which the ethical requirements of neighbourhood and historic rooting in locale are the primary ethical and 'spiritual' qualities. It is these that motivate a high proportion of the 'occasional offices' of the church, the moments when most residents, as it were, 'bump into' the invisible parish boundary.[693] At such times, it is the language of (parochial, not congregational) 'belonging' rather than 'believing' that best articulates the desire for Anglican ministry and suggests that the church must, in turn, be able to interpret local attachment (liturgically, as much as anything) in Christian terms, not uproot it in theological translation. Whilst the 'belonging' expressed by participants clearly has strong elements of cultural nostalgia, the impression is less of 'something lost' than of something living - a 'chain of memory' in Hervieu-Leger's term, linking the present-day community to an historic faith. Indeed, surveying the results from Oxted and Tandridge, one cannot help but echo Jenkins' own empirical conclusions about the parish of Kingswood, twenty years earlier, whose type of bounded community continued to thrive, despite long being considered 'about to disappear'.[694]

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[692] Douglas Davies, 'Priest, Parish and People: Reconceiving a Relationship', in Guest, Tusting & Woodhead (eds.), *Congregational studies in the UK: Christianity in a Post-Christian Context* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006) p.157.
[693] Research into local attachment as a driver of occasional office requests would be a rewarding next stage of research for this kind of parochial study.
[694] Jenkins, *Religion*, p.216.

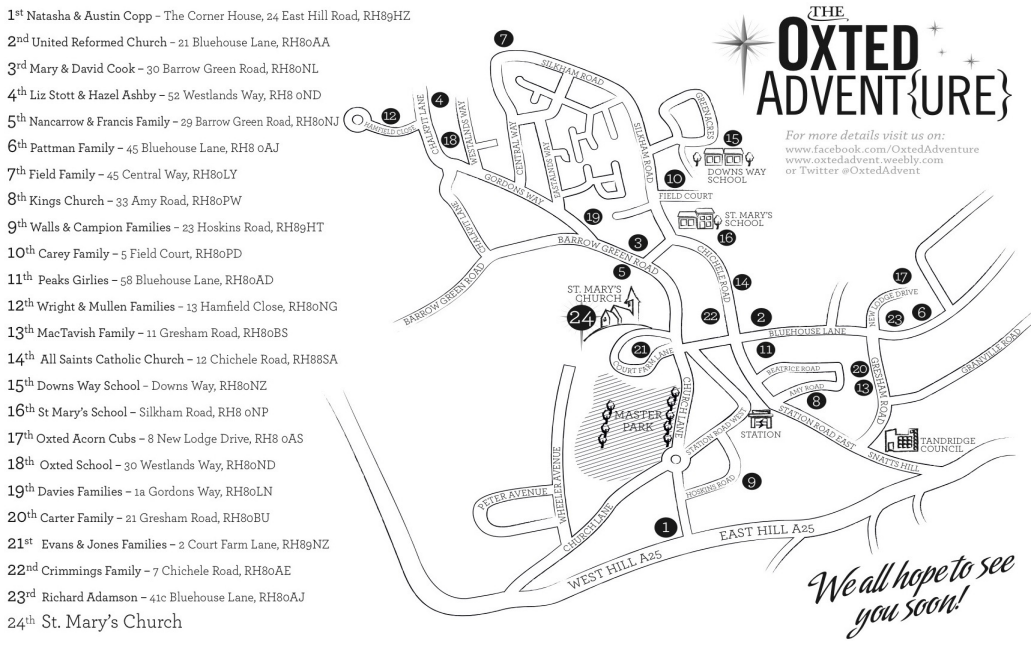
Postscript: the Oxted Adventure

As a consequence of this case study, the decision was taken, in 2013, to attempt to harness the pronounced sense of locality and 'belonging' expressed in the data – in particular, to explore the concept of 'parishioner' and to see how this *penumbra* of community surrounding the congregation, to which those interviewed more or less associated, might be mapped and mobilised. The result was 'The Oxted Adventure', a festive project that took place in the Advent Season of 2013 and 2014. The intention was to express, spatially and communally, the parochial ideal in ways that acknowledged its priority of 'belonging' over 'believing' for the majority of participants in the case study. The parochial, it was believed, had a distinct 'habitus' that differed in significant ways from that of the church congregation – one of which was the aforementioned 'accessing' of ecclesial life at various normative points in the calendar, such as Remembrance, and Harvest.

Beginning from the recognition of Christmas as the principal normative 'point of access' to parochial traditions of belonging, the aim was to create a new social norm during the Advent season preceding it, one that was definitely parochial rather than congregational – in other words, one that consciously blended 'secular' and 'sacred' practices. It was essential that this new parochial tradition had a spatial form that was not bounded by the parish church buildings. Whilst festive times gave 'permission' in Goffman's terms, for normal, 'secular', life to be suspended and church to be attended when it would be less 'normal' to do so at other times, the intention was to 'map' the symbolism afforded by the parish church in a form of spatial interaction that, rather like the 'beating of the bounds', enabled a more dynamic form of interaction with the social and physical landscape. It was, in short, an exercise in place-making – and, as such, the sketch map in the publicity leaflet was a key aspect of the Adventure's imaginative conception of place: graphically demonstrating the integration of individual homes in shared, 'parochial' space.

Every evening during Advent, for an hour between 6 and 7pm, specific 'spaces' in Oxted were opened, rather in the fashion of doors on an Advent calendar. Most spaces were domestic garages, but they also included communal centres – school lobbies, the local theatre and so on – as well as a concluding gathering in the church porch – a highly symbolic liminal location, whose historic, liturgical significance marking the boundary of sacred and secular space made it a natural choice for the climax of such a project.[695]

The events conducted in each space varied from simple social gatherings with mulled wine and carol singing, to highly creative occasions featuring interactive art installations, live music and theatre.



Central to the broader parochial 'ownership' of the Oxted Adventure was the fact that, while St Mary's Church was responsible for the vision and overall leadership, the planning and implementation was shared across the congregational boundary, by a broad team, united by a sense of sympathy towards its communal aims.

695 Steve Hindle notes the historic significance of the church porch as a liminal space in *The Self-Contained Village: The Social History of Rural Communities, 1250-1900* (Hatfield, University of Hertfordshire Press,2007), p.48ff

The first, 2013, season was so successful in terms of attendance and enthusiasm that the 'Adventure' was repeated and expanded in 2014, with greater publicity and broader attendance.

Whilst the Oxted Adventure deserves an empirical study of its own, its emergence as a direct consequence of the 'Parish and Belonging' ethnographic study merits its inclusion here, as a popular new form of parochial tradition.

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